

APRIL 8, 2024

# THE EARTH AWARDS

# TIME

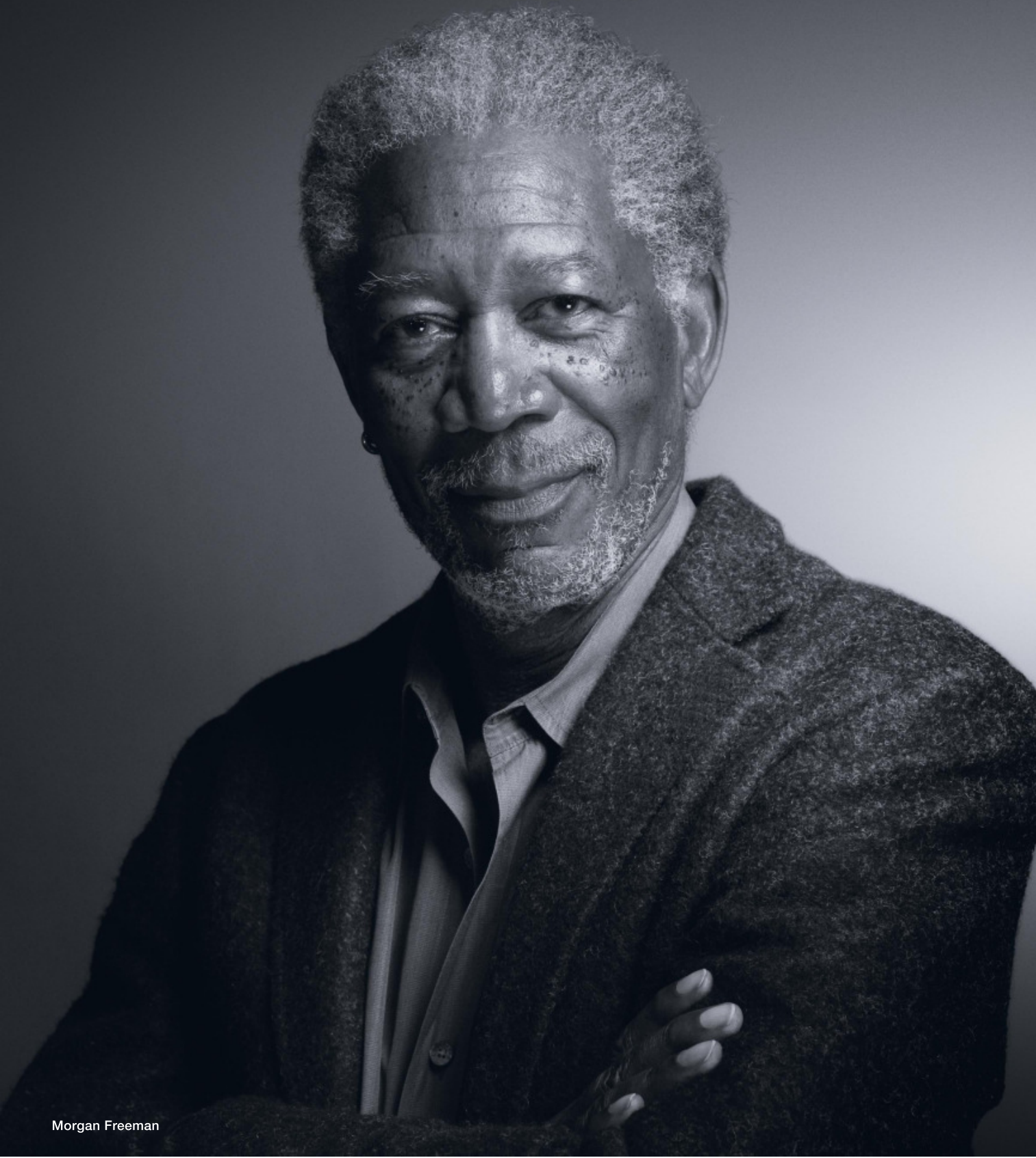
## JANE FONDA'S NEXT ACT

+

LEADERS  
WORKING  
TO SAVE THE  
PLANET







Morgan Freeman



Grand Siècle  
Laurent-Perrier

*It takes time to become an icon*

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*President Biden leaves the Capitol on March 15*  
*Photograph by Aaron Schwartz NurPhoto/Shutterstock*





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# EASING CAREGIVER BURDEN FOR ELDERLY QUALITY OF LIFE OUTCOMES

In the US over 81 million will be 65 or older by 2040.

**The impact of an aging population is wide-ranging. Not the least of which is that, coupled with declining birth rates, there are less people available to support and care for them. It is estimated that over 70% of the 10,000-a-day-retiring baby boomers will require some sort of care as they age.**

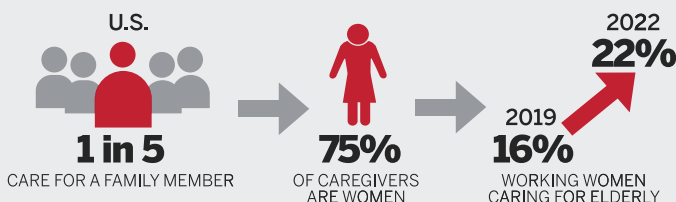
This shortage in elderly caregivers has developed into a global crisis. It is estimated, for example, that in OECD countries the number of elderly care workers will need to increase by 60% by 2040 simply to maintain the current ratio of elderly to caregivers.

Home care providers are struggling with finding new staff as well as keeping existing staff. For instance, according to the 2023 Home Care Providers Benchmarking Report, caregiver turnover is now at 77%.

Informal caregivers are bearing the brunt of the caregiver shortage. One in five adults in the US is taking care of a family member.

Most of them (75%) are women, and increasingly, many caregivers are working full time in addition to carrying out their care duties. Working while caregiving has risen from 16% in 2019 to 22% in 2022.

The workload is only increasing. From 2020 to 2023, for example, the average hours informal caregivers spent caring for an elderly family member rose from an average of 9 hours per week to 26 hours per week. About 1 in 3 caregivers spend 30 hours or more in providing care, many while holding down full time jobs.



## WORKING AND CAREGIVING IMPACTS QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL

On the work front, almost 4 in 10 caregivers are forced to quit their jobs to make time to care for a family member, costing employers an average of \$50,000 per annum to replace each of them.

Additionally, it is estimated that loss of productivity amounts to \$33 billion annually, and demands on healthcare benefits cost employers an additional \$13.4 billion a year.

Employees who are also caregivers suffer an off-times irrecoverable blow to their finances as a result of having to leave their jobs, cut back hours or accept a lower-paying position.

About 45% of caregivers report negative effects on their finances from being unable to save short-term (28%), or for retirement (12%). One study reports that 25% of caregivers have less than \$1000 savings to draw on. One in 5 report struggling simply to pay their bills.

The constant demands of caring places a physical and mental strain on caregivers.

According to the CDC, 53% of caregivers are more likely to have two or more chronic conditions. And 47% have reported depression or anxiety or other mental issues in the past year - 62% more than non-caregivers.

Alarming, as baby boomers age, their adult millennial children, who also have children of their own, are finding themselves part of the growing sandwich generation, being stretched at both ends of the age-caring spectrum. According to the Pew Research Center, more than one in ten adults with a child under 18 also cares for an aging parent - and 75% of these are, additionally, working full time.

## SMOOTHING THE CAREGIVING PATHWAY

Japan has led the way in promoting and supporting aging in place both for the elderly and for their carers.

Japanese companies, such as the global insurer SOMPO, have been at the forefront of innovative solutions to address issues of aging.

SOMPO, through its wholly-owned subsidiary, Sompo Horizon, has transformed the aging in place landscape with innovative digital products and services that promote independent living and quality of life for the elderly in the US.



## CONTENT FROM SOMPO HOLDINGS



Sompo Horizon has, for instance, established a Joint Business Relationship (JBR) with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in the US.

The partnership leverages PwC's substantial proficiency in professional services alongside Sompo Horizon's state-of-the-art offerings for employee family caregivers.

“Ultimately, our collaboration with PwC focuses on empowering caregivers to embrace their roles and experiences, while also assisting employer organizations in meeting their employees' need for work-life integration. This, in turn, results in decreased turnover, improved employee satisfaction, and an overall reduction in healthcare costs associated with caregiver burnout.”

*Tetsuya Morito, President of Sompo Horizon*

### **SOMPO HORIZON IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF CAREGO**

Sompo Horizon has joined the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) AgeTech Collaborative as an enterprise member.

The AARP AgeTech Collaborative was established to promote and support innovators in solving age-related issues through providing guidance, community, and financial assistance.

Sompo Horizon is currently partnered with four AARP AgeTech Collaborative startups to bring solutions and services to family caregivers through their digital offering, CareGo.

CareGo was created with a vision to bring a curated one-stop-shop of products and services to ease the care burden of the more than 53 million family caregivers in the US—especially those holding down jobs.

Since launching in January 2024, CareGo has seen an influx of caregivers interested in learning more about ways to better care for themselves and support their loved ones.

CareGo makes it easier to balance caregiving and work by providing access to professional Care Advisors.

Care Advisors provide tailored resources, tools, and support as well as linking and coordinating access to trusted and verified partners. Partners provide otherwise time-consuming but necessary services such as home upkeep and assistance with daily tasks such as bathing or transportation.

Care Advisors also focus on helping caregivers understand the importance of self-care, which includes taking much needed time for themselves.

Sompo Horizon's Care Advisors encourage caregivers to assemble a Care Team—a dedicated circle of support consisting of family, friends, healthcare professionals and others, to share caring responsibilities and make it a more manageable experience.

In its first few months of operations, CareGo has already received much positive feedback from caregivers using their services:

“Talking with my Care Advisor helped me organize my thoughts and put a plan together to better support my parents.”

“Having this service saved me a lot of time in trying to find resources on my own.”

“CareGo is an invaluable resource for providing our employees with the support they need to effectively manage their dual roles as dedicated professionals and compassionate family caregivers.”

*Marlena Edwards, Head of People & Culture, Americas at DEPT®, a global digital agency, and CareGo client*

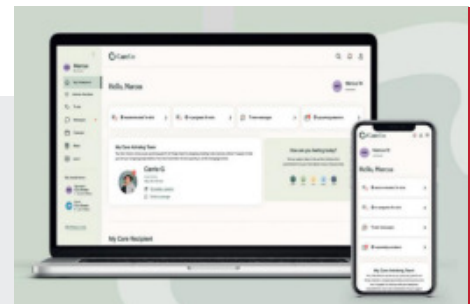
With five contracted employer organizations on board, and several more in the pipeline, CareGo is well positioned to provide live advising and caregiver support to employers who are seeking to provide their employees with a more balanced work life integration.

### **IMPROVED ELDERLY CARE AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

Sompo Horizon's CareGo platform helps alleviate the worry that often accompanies caregiving, streamlining and simplifying the caregiving journey, and giving back valuable time to caregivers so that they can more effectively care for their loved ones.

Sompo Horizon's future strategy includes offering the CareGo platform direct to the consumer as well as working with healthcare systems and health plans to help improve the quality of life for their members, the elderly, and society as a whole.

**To learn more about Sompo Horizon's innovative aging solutions, please visit <https://sompohorizon.com/solutions/>**



# SOMPO





### Streaming now

Grab the popcorn: two documentaries co-produced by TIME Studios can now be screened at home. *Frida*, available on Amazon Prime, is the first Frida Kahlo documentary to be told entirely in the artist's own words, bringing her paintings to life along with innovative animations. *The Lionheart* (left), now playing on Max, follows Susie Wheldon, the widow of the late Indy 500 champ Dan Wheldon, as her two sons embark on racing careers of their own.

See more TIME Studios projects at [studios.time.com](https://studios.time.com)

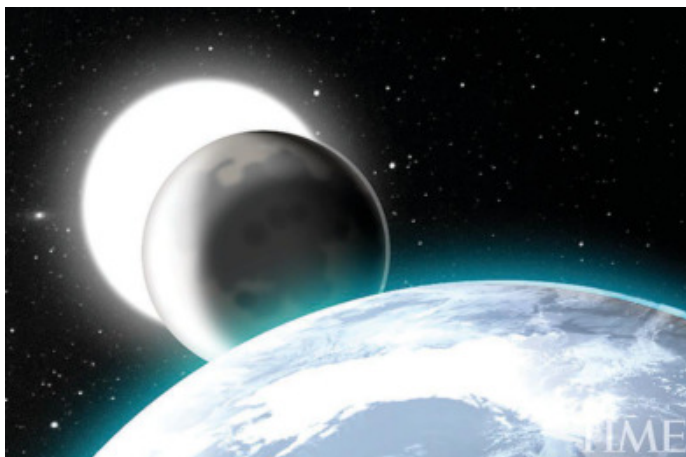


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### Everything you need to know about the eclipse

TIME's Science section is answering all your questions about the April 8 total solar eclipse, including where to watch the eclipse, where to find special glasses to do so, and how to protect your eyes. TIME editor-at-large Jeffrey Kluger will be reporting from Cleveland. Find his dispatch and all TIME coverage of the eclipse at [time.com/science](https://time.com/science)

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### On the covers

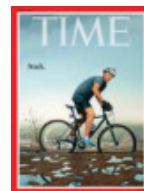


Illustration by  
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#### Kudos

The hottest magazine cover of the year on Adweek's annual Media Hot List is TIME's Person of the Year issue featuring Taylor Swift. [time.com/poy](https://time.com/poy)

### SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In "Company Man" (March 25), we misstated the Thai Prime Minister's educational background. He did not attend Chulalongkorn University.



# DIRIYAH

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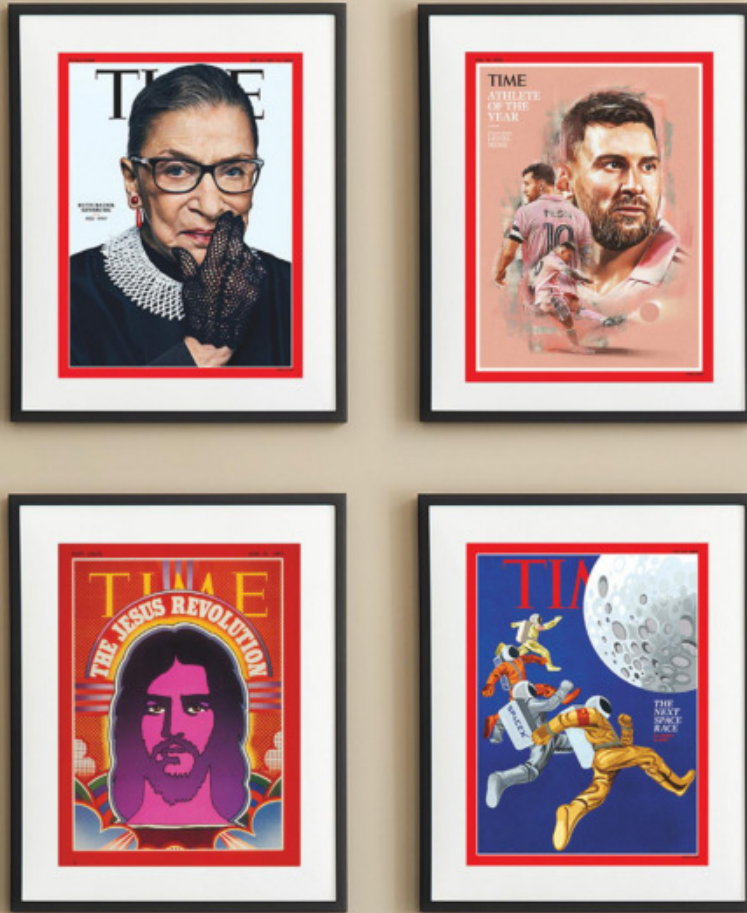


At-Turaif District in Diriyah  
inscribed on the World  
Heritage List in 2010

**At-Turaif,**  
**UNESCO World Heritage Site**  
The birthplace of the Kingdom  
A 300-year-old legacy

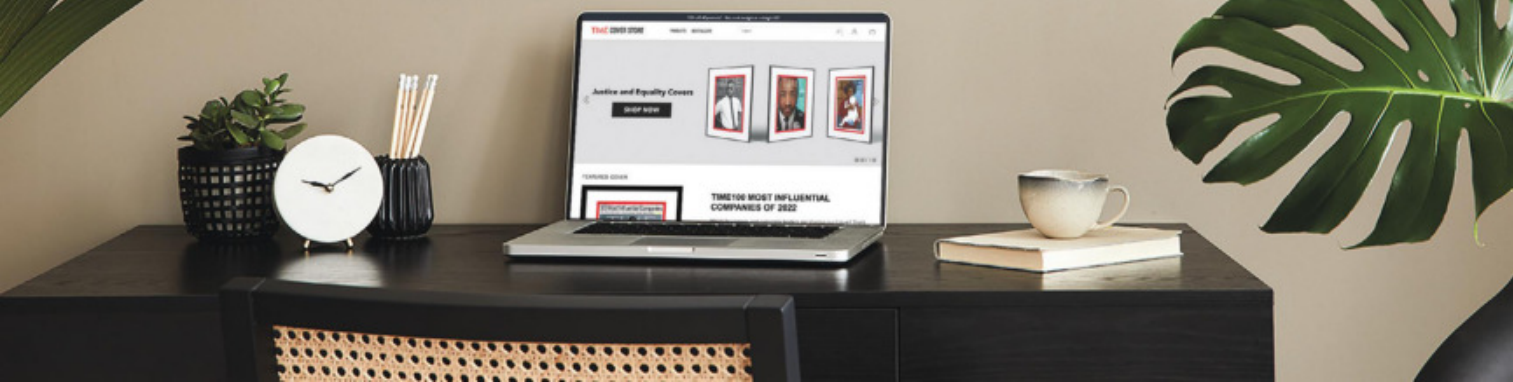
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# The Brief



## THE POLITICS OF TIKTOK

BY ERIC CORTELLESSA

How the Chinese platform's popularity, and self-interest, took Trump from ban to embrace

INSIDE

INDIA READIES ITSELF FOR  
A SEVEN-PHASE ELECTION

TAG-TEAMING THE KREMLIN  
ON POLITICAL PRISONERS

THE NATURAL REACTION  
TO A TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNA MONEYMAKER

**A**S CONGRESS CONSIDERS LEGISLATION THAT could lead to a TikTok ban, the popular platform has found an unlikely ally: Donald Trump.

The former President has recently railed against a bill that would remove TikTok from U.S. app stores unless its Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, sells its stake. To many, the move came out of left field. As President, Trump signed an Executive Order to ban TikTok unless an American company acquired it, alleging the Chinese government was using the video-sharing service to surveil millions of Americans. Challenged in federal court, the order never went into effect.

But now Trump sees some utility in helping to keep TikTok around, especially after President Joe Biden said he would sign the new congressional bill into law. “Frankly, there are a lot of people on TikTok that love it,” Trump told CNBC. “There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it.”

Trump’s flip-flop has sparked allegations that he’s doing the bidding of a powerful donor with a stake in ByteDance. But part of his calculus, sources familiar with Trump’s thinking tell TIME, is the opportunity to make gains with younger voters by protecting a platform they love.

“He realizes that a lot of people would be upset if it were banned,” says a Trump operative working on the re-election effort. “Now Trump and Biden are on opposite sides of an issue where younger voters are clearly in favor of not banning TikTok.”

Trump has other reasons for the reversal. He recently struck a rapprochement with the antitax group Club for Growth, after it admitted defeat in an expensive effort to keep Trump from winning the nomination. “We’re back in love,” Trump told a gathering of its donors, per Politico, soon after meeting with one of its benefactors, billionaire Jeff Yass. The group opposes the TikTok bill, mirroring the position of Yass, whose investment company owns 15% of ByteDance. To boost the effort, Club for Growth hired Trump loyalist Kellyanne Conway to advocate for TikTok on the Hill.

Trump also fears the legislation would strengthen one of his nemeses: Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram. Trump resents the company’s founder, Mark Zuckerberg, for donating \$400 million in 2020 to help governments facilitate mail voting, a system Trump baselessly maligns as rife with fraud. Trump and his allies further accuse the company of suppressing conservative content and news stories damaging to Democrats. “Zuckerberg’s censorship of the Hunter Biden laptop story helped the Democrats dramatically in 2020,” says Alex Bruesewitz,

a Trump ally and GOP consultant. (Zuckerberg has said Facebook never kept users from posting about the story, but limited how much the story was amplified.)

Despite Trump’s opposition, the TikTok bill sailed through the House on March 13 on a bipartisan 352-65 vote. But it faces an uphill climb in the Senate, even as the White House pushes for its passage.

**THE D.C. TIKTOK DEBATE** is primarily focused on national security. Chinese law obliges Chinese companies to cooperate on intelligence. In 2020, Washington forced a Chinese company to sell the dating app Grindr after reports it supplied users’ private data to Beijing. There are similar fears that TikTok could also be a tool for spying—or propaganda. A third of U.S. adults under 30 regularly scroll TikTok for news, according to a Pew survey. Several polls show it is

Gen Z’s top source for news and information.

Security was Trump’s stated concern about the platform while President. But it’s become popular among his supporters. The Nelk Boys, whose podcast Trump has appeared on twice, have 4.6 million followers on the app. Tucker Carlson has 1.3 million. The right-wing account American Wire News amassed more than 6.5 million views for a recent clip of Trump bringing onstage a supporter who had kicked out a heckler at one of his rallies.

Like other social media, TikTok could mobilize the MAGA faithful. “It has an extremely personalized algorithm,” says Ashley Johnson, a policy analyst for the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation in

Washington. “It can amplify these filter bubbles we create for ourselves in terms of primarily or even only seeing political content that we agree with.”

An analysis by Tufts researchers that found young voters favored Biden over Trump in 2020 by a 25-point margin. But recent polls show that gap to be shrinking. An Axios–Generation Lab survey of voters under 35 in February found Biden leading by just 4 percentage points. Campaign operatives think TikTok may be crucial to reaching those voters. The app, which grew by 12% from 2021 to 2023, is now used by more than 170 million Americans. That growth, members of Trump’s inner circle say, helps explain why he is now defending it. “TikTok is more relevant now than when that Executive Order was written,” says the Trump operative.

Some Trump allies expect him to turn it into a campaign wedge issue. “This is Biden’s ban now,” says Bruesewitz, “and tens of millions of young voters know it.” □

**‘As far as  
Tik-Tok is  
concerned,  
we’re banning  
them from the  
United States.’**

—DONALD TRUMP,

ON JULY 31, 2020, BEFORE SIGNING AN EXECUTIVE ORDER THAT WAS LATER BLOCKED IN COURT





## A gang crisis in Haiti

A police officer guards the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince on March 14, 12 days after gang members stormed the country's two largest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. Gangs were implicated in the 2021 assassination of the last elected President, and since February they have plunged the Caribbean nation of 11 million into chaos.

### THE BULLETIN

## Why India's next election will last 44 days

INDIA'S ELECTIONS ARE THE LARGEST democratic exercise in the world, with nearly 970 million registered voters expected to cast ballots, including 18 million new voters. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced that this year's poll will take place in seven phases, lasting 44 days. Indians will head to the polls from April 19 to June 1. Results are to be declared on June 4.

**HISTORIC TIMELINE** The election will be the second longest polling exercise in India's electoral history. Balloting is broken down not only by phase but also by region, all in the hope of administering an orderly election. In some states like Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, voting will take place on all seven days the ECI has

announced—April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25, and June 1. In others, like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, balloting will take place on only one day.

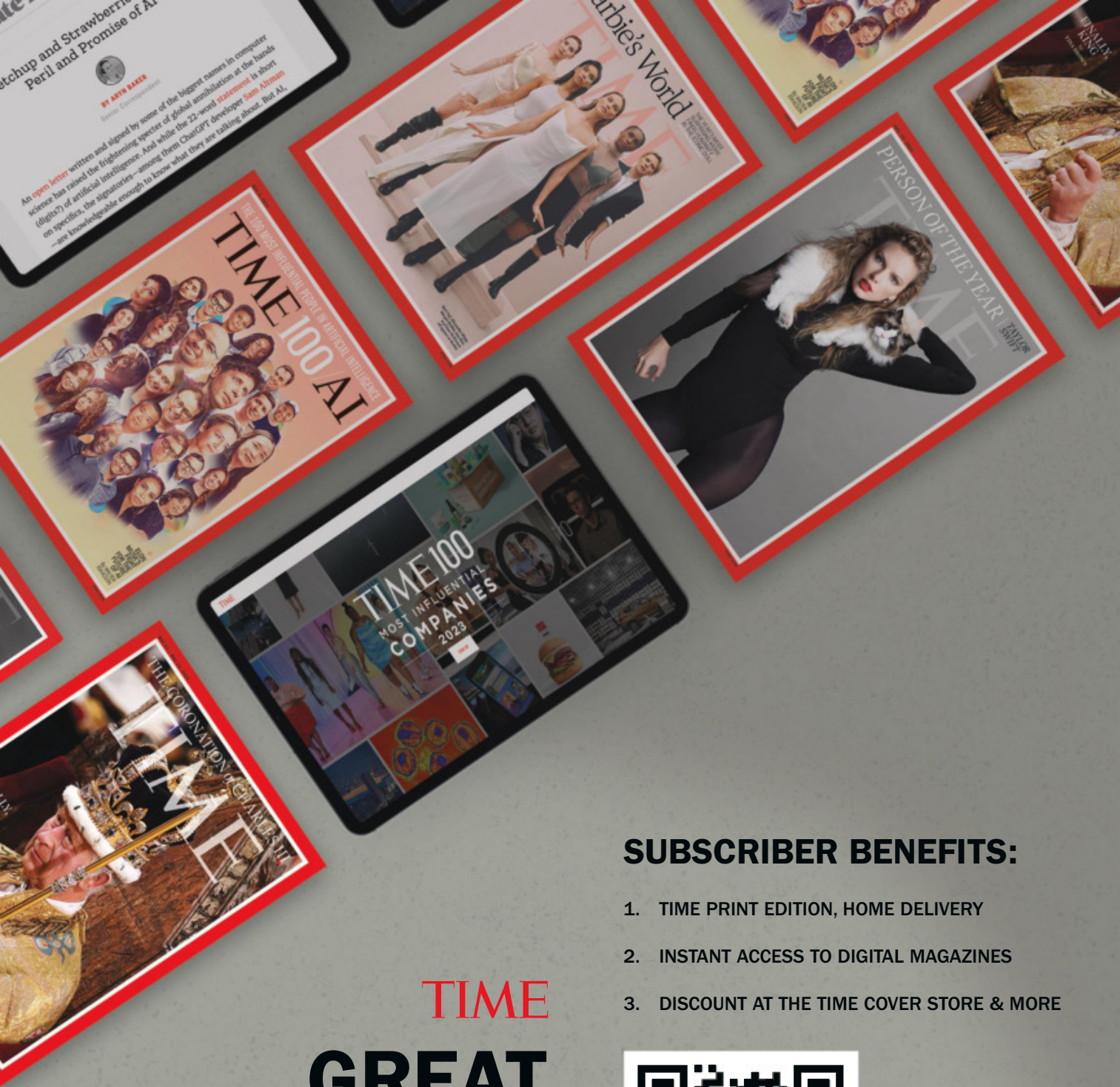
**SCATTERED APPROACH** The regional phases of India's elections are determined based on how populated—as well as how contentious—the vote might be in each state. For example, voting in the most densely populated state of Uttar Pradesh, which is also notorious for political intimidation and electoral influence, is broken up into seven phases. Only in the end, after all ballots have been cast nationwide, are

votes counted. The tally and the announcement of the results happen on the same day. No one—including Prime Minister Narendra Modi—knows who won any given seat beforehand.

**FREE AND FAIR?** The election is coming at a time when India is grappling with the challenge of ensuring voter participation, free speech, and electoral independence while authoritarianism is on the rise. During Modi's second term, Freedom House downgraded India's democracy rating from "free" to "partly free" because of the government's discriminatory policies against Muslims, as well as its targeting of critics and the media. —ASTHA RAJVANSHI







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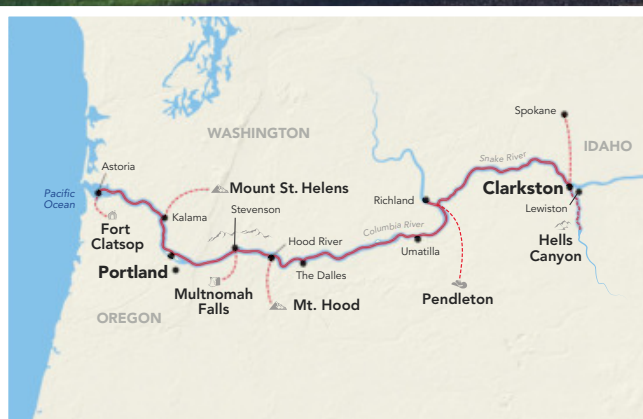
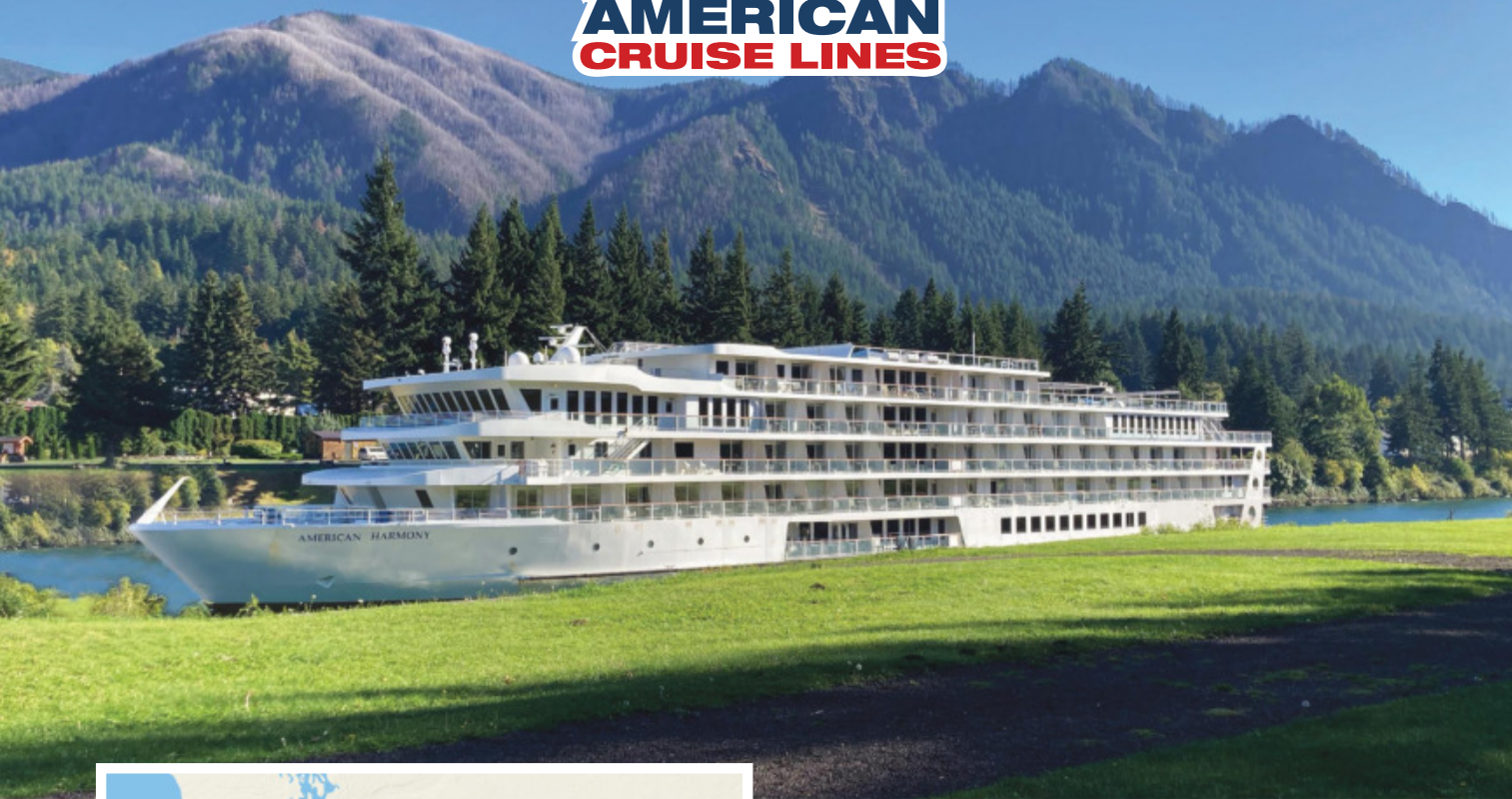
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## GOOD QUESTION

## Are pigs the future of organ transplants?

BY ALICE PARK

ON MARCH 16, A TRANSPLANT-SURGERY TEAM AT MASSACHUSETTS General Hospital successfully transplanted a modified pig kidney into a human: 62-year-old Richard Slayman. The groundbreaking, four-hour surgery was the culmination of years of work transplanting kidneys from a specially bred group of pigs—genetically modified to more closely resemble those of humans—into primates. Encouraged by those results, the team at Mass General Brigham was confident it was time to test the pig organs in the first patient.

Slayman, a manager at the Massachusetts department of transportation, had received a human kidney transplant five years ago, but as is often the case with kidney disease, the organ began to fail and he continued to need dialysis. His health progressively worsened.

“At one point, he literally said, I just cannot go on like this,” said Dr. Winfred Williams, Slayman’s physician and associate chair of nephrology at Mass General, during a briefing.

Dr. Tatsuo Kawai, director of the hospital’s Legorreta Center for Clinical Transplant Tolerance, who had performed the human transplant five years ago, also performed the pig-kidney surgery. As more than a dozen people watched, Kawai carefully connected the pig kidney to Slayman’s circulatory system—not an easy task, given the patient’s history of diabetes and hypertension, which had weakened his blood vessels. “The size of the pig kidney was exactly the same as the human kidney,” he said. “Upon restoration of blood flow into the kidney, the kidney pinked up immediately and started to make urine. When we saw the first urine output, everyone in the operating room burst into applause. It was truly the most beautiful kidney I have ever seen.”

The kidney came from a special group of pigs bred to produce human-like kidneys. Biotech company eGenesis worked closely with the hospital to produce them, using genetic innovations developed over recent decades. The pigs’ cells were treated with the gene-editing technology CRISPR, which allows scientists to make very precise genetic changes in cells. These cells were then used to create pig clones so the pigs would have identical and consistent genetic changes. Their kidneys were then transplanted first into primates, and finally into Slayman.

All told, the pig kidneys contained 69 genetic changes: The scientists knocked out or eliminated three pig genes that trigger immediate rejection by the human immune system, added seven human genes to make the pig tissue

appear more human to the immune cells, and inactivated viral genes in pig cells that could cause infections. They also used a unique cocktail of antibody treatments to further dampen the immune reaction to the transplanted kidney.

**THE COMPANY IS WORKING** on other pig organs as well. In January, eGenesis partnered with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania to transplant a genetically modified pig liver into a brain-dead patient. That work, along with Slayman’s experience, is making a strong case for the role of pig organs in addressing the shortage of organs for patients on waiting lists. More than 100,000 people are placed on the kidney-

transplant waiting list in the U.S. each year; only 20,000 kidneys are available.

More transplants may provide a better idea of how long the pig kidneys function and whether they can meaningfully extend the length and quality of patients’ lives. For now, says Williams, patients might benefit from receiving a pig kidney temporarily as they wait for a human one. Such bridging can

be critical for patients like Slayman; while on dialysis, he experienced clotting issues and required dozens of surgeries to improve his circulation.

“We never anticipated dialysis would become a lifelong solution for kidney failure,” said Dr. Leonardo Riella, medical director of kidney transplantation at Mass General Brigham and lead investigator of the trial. “Yet this is the stark reality for over 600,000 patients in the U.S.; dialysis has sadly become their last resort for managing their disease. Now picture a different narrative, one where healthy kidneys are readily available for transplantation. Today we are offering a glimmer of hope that may one day be possible for many more patients.”

▼  
Surgeons  
performing  
the landmark  
operation



**‘It was truly the most beautiful kidney I have ever seen.’**

—DR. TATSUO KAWAI,  
SURGEON



**DIED**

► Mississippi-born **civil rights activist Dorie Ladner**, who began organizing and protesting as a teenager, on March 11 at 81.

► **Astronaut Thomas Stafford**, who in 1975 commanded the first joint U.S.-Soviet space mission, on March 18 at 93.

**ANNOUNCED**

New EPA regulations **limiting automobile tailpipe emissions**; the agency said the March 20 move, meant to encourage electric-vehicle usage, could reduce vehicular carbon releases by 7 billion tons over 30 years.

**FILED**

An antitrust suit **alleging Apple has an illegal monopoly in smartphones**, by the Justice Department on March 21.

**ELECTED**

A new Prime Minister of Wales, Labour Party head Vaughan Gething—the **first Black leader of a U.K. government**—on March 20.

**RETURNED**

Boss (and musician) **Bruce Springsteen**, to the stage for the first stop of a world tour, in Phoenix on March 19, after he postponed shows last year for health reasons.



*The Princess announced her news in a video released March 22*

**DIAGNOSED****Kate Middleton***Princess facing cancer fight*

WHEN KENSINGTON PALACE ANNOUNCED ON JAN. 17 THAT Catherine, the Princess of Wales, had undergone a “planned abdominal surgery” and would likely not participate in any public engagements until after Easter, speculation swirled. In the press and online, many wondered what was behind such a prolonged absence from royal duties. The question sparked both well-wishes and—especially after a Mother’s Day photo of the Princess and her children was revealed to have been manipulated—conspiracy theories. But when Kate Middleton herself announced in a video released March 22 that she had been diagnosed with cancer following that surgery and was undergoing “preventative chemotherapy,” the news was a sober reminder life is no less fragile for being lived in public.

In the video, the Princess thanked the public for their messages of support during her recovery from surgery, sharing that while doctors had thought the condition that initially required the surgery, about which the palace did not share more information, was noncancerous, “tests after the operation found cancer had been present.” The royal—whose illness compounds an already difficult time for the British monarchy, as King Charles III faces his own cancer diagnosis—added that she and Prince William had stayed silent in part to have an opportunity to privately explain her diagnosis to her three young children and “to reassure them that I am going to be OK.”

Kate’s appeal for continued privacy was received by a world perhaps chastened by the furor over her no longer mysterious whereabouts. “We hope that you’ll understand that as a family we now need some time, space, and privacy while I complete my treatment,” she said. “My work has always brought me a deep sense of joy, and I look forward to being back when I am able. But for now, I must focus on making a full recovery.”

—SOLCYRÉ BURGA and SIMMONE SHAH

**DROPPED****Happiness in the U.S.***A new low*

For the first time in the 12-year history of the World Happiness Report, the U.S. did not rank in the top 20 of the world’s happiest countries. Of the more than 140 nations surveyed, the U.S. came in 23rd, compared with 15th in 2023.

While the U.S. is still in the top 10 happiest countries for people 60 and older, its overall ranking fell because of a significant decline in the reported well-being of Americans under 30.

Finland ranked at the top of the list for the seventh year in a row. Lithuania is the happiest country in the world if you look only at those under the age of 30, while Denmark is the happiest country for those 60 and older.

This was the first year the report, released March 20, analyzed rates of happiness by age group. Said John F. Helliwell, professor at the Vancouver School of Economics and founding editor of the report: “There is a great variety among countries in the relative happiness of the younger, older, and in-between populations.” —S.B.





◀  
Evgenia Kara-Murza, wife  
of imprisoned Russian  
activist Vladimir Kara-  
Murza, pictured behind her

## ELECTIONS

## Fighting to free Russia's political prisoners

BY YASMEEN SERHAN

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY THIS MARCH was more of a coronation than an election. With the political system heavily skewed in his favor and all significant opponents disqualified, jailed, or dead, the vote was almost entirely pro forma. Still, the Russian opposition lives on—not just in would-be leaders behind bars like Vladimir Kara-Murza, who following the death of Alexei Navalny is now Russia's most high-profile political prisoner, but also in the spouses who take up their advocacy when they're no longer able to do it themselves.

Ever since Vladimir's arrest in April 2022 for criticizing the war in Ukraine, Evgenia Kara-Murza has spent most of her days traveling the world to meet with foreign dignitaries, testify before committees, and talk to journalists—all in a bid to bring her husband, and the scores of other political prisoners in Russia, home. When TIME first sat down with her on the sidelines of the 15th Annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy last year, she stressed that she was no politician. "I never wanted to be a public figure," she said.

Yet there she was, delivering speeches and giving interviews about the plight of political prisoners, the importance of supporting Ukraine against Russia's ongoing invasion, and the need for Magnitsky sanctions, which target officials who violate human rights. "She basically stepped into his shoes and took over from his work as a member of the Russian opposition, speaking not just about his situation, but about the situation of other political prisoners," says Bill Browder, a British American anticorruption campaigner and close friend of the Kara-Murza family. "She feels it's her duty to be the best possible representative of him when he's unable to represent himself."

**'I believe  
this is  
what  
marriage  
is about.'**

—EVGENIA  
KARA-MURZA,  
ACTIVIST

Born on the Kuril Islands in Russia's far east, Evgenia spent much of her childhood traveling around the Soviet Union (her father was in the coast guard). It was after her family settled in Moscow that, at the age of 11, she first met Vladimir. Though at 14, Vladimir moved with his mother to Britain while Evgenia remained in Russia, pursuing a degree at Moscow State Linguistic University, they reconnected in their 20s and have been together ever since.

Evgenia says she always supported her husband's pro-democracy work, even as the space for him to do it within Russia began to shrink. In 2003, Vladimir stood in Russia's parliamentary elections—a contest that, while ostensibly free, was far from fair, resulting in a victory for the ruling United Russia party. The following year, they moved to Washington, D.C., where Vladimir became the bureau chief for the independent Russian broadcaster RTVI. During their years in the U.S., the political situation in Russia continued to deteriorate. "It became apparent that if Vladimir were to continue with his work as he saw fit, the kids needed to be in a safe place," she says. "So I mostly stayed with the kids working from home and Vladimir traveled the world, trying to bring change, to open the world's eyes to the nature of Vladimir Putin's regime."

**BUT IT WOULDN'T BE LONG** before Vladimir faced the consequences of his activism. In May 2015 he was poisoned for the first time; the second came two years later. In both cases, he fell into a coma. Both times, Evgenia nursed him back to health, helping him relearn how to walk, to talk, and even how to eat. "I believe this is what marriage is about," Evgenia told TIME in Geneva. "You share everything and you're there for each other. That's the only way to me."

Evgenia isn't the only spouse who has come to politics in this way. In the

KARA-MURZA: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS—AFP/GETTY IMAGES; MUNN: CHRIS WILLARD—DISNEY/GETTY IMAGES



aftermath of Navalny's death, his wife Yulia Navalnaya vowed to take up his fight. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of Belarus' exiled opposition, challenged Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko for the country's presidency in the place of her husband, the jailed pro-democracy activist Siarhei Tsikhanouski.

All three women represent an increasingly pronounced feminine face of anti-Kremlin activism—one that has emerged within a political culture in which politicians' wives are rarely seen, much less heard. The circumstances notwithstanding, Evgenia welcomes this change, but she also stresses that there are others, including ethnic minorities and members of the LGBTQ community, who are changing the face of the pro-democracy and antiwar movements in Russia. "It's becoming so diverse, and it's interesting that it's happening under these impossible circumstances."

If Evgenia fears for her or her family's safety, she doesn't show it. She speaks with a coolheaded resolve—the kind that Browder attributes to the justness of her cause and to her being "just a really decent human being." It's perhaps because that cause is bigger than just her husband and her family that Evgenia never comes across as a worried spouse. The last thing she wants is pity. "I hate condolences and expressions of sympathy because that's not what I need," she says. "I need action."

When asked where she gets her strength, Evgenia quotes Eleanor Roosevelt: "A woman is like a tea bag. You never know how strong she is until she's in hot water." This April will mark two years since Vladimir's arrest, and two years since Evgenia was plunged into her current role. The longer she's in it, the stronger she seems to get. And the angrier, too.

"That rage that I feel because this murderous government has been trying to destroy my family for so many years, is currently trying to destroy the neighboring country and all chances for a normal future for our country—that rage," she says, before letting out a deep exhale. "A woman is like a tea bag." □

#### HEALTH

## The five-minute quiz that helped catch Olivia Munn's cancer

BY ALICE PARK

Actor Olivia Munn recently shared in an Instagram post that a free risk-assessment tool her doctor used revealed that she had a higher chance of developing breast cancer. It led to testing—and eventually treatment—that likely spared her from more serious outcomes.

The Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool isn't new. It's been around since 1989 for women ages 35 to 74, and it doesn't even require a doctor. The online questionnaire, available through the National Cancer Institute (NCI), asks about a woman's age, her family history of breast cancer, when she began menstruating, how old she was when she had her first child (if applicable), and if she's had any breast biopsies. It then estimates her risk of getting breast cancer in five years and over the course of her life.

"This calculator is a great first step that women can do on their own and discuss the results with their primary-care doctor or gynecologist," says Dr. Jennifer Litton, professor of breast medical oncology at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

The tool was built using data from the Breast Cancer Demonstration Project, a 1970s study of 280,000 white women, and the NCI

Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. Data from Black, Hispanic, and Asian women were added later to provide more accurate predictions for women of different races and ethnicities. While it's still less accurate for women of color, research has found that the tool is about 98% accurate in predicting disease risk.

It's especially helpful for those who have a family history of breast cancer, people who don't know their genetic risk for the disease, and those who don't have major genes for breast cancer such as BRCA1 or BRCA2—which was the case for Munn. About half a million women use it annually, according to NCI—and after Munn's post, "the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool received a dramatic increase in visits," a spokesperson said.

Some doctors use the questionnaire in

conjunction with a slightly more comprehensive one called the Tyrer-Cuzick model, which is also free and available online. Together with regular mammograms starting around age 40, these risk assessments help doctors decide which women should get mammograms more frequently and whether they need additional tests like an MRI. Knowing a woman's risk score can lead to early detection of cancer, as it did for Munn.

Yet many women aren't aware that there's a short risk quiz they can take, then discuss with their doctors. "Knowledge is power," says Dr. Larry Norton, medical director of the Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. "The more you know about yourself, and the more you engage with medical professionals, the better you can get answers that are appropriate for you."



On Instagram, Munn said she hoped to help others find "support on their own journey"

## SPACE

# How nature reacts to a total eclipse

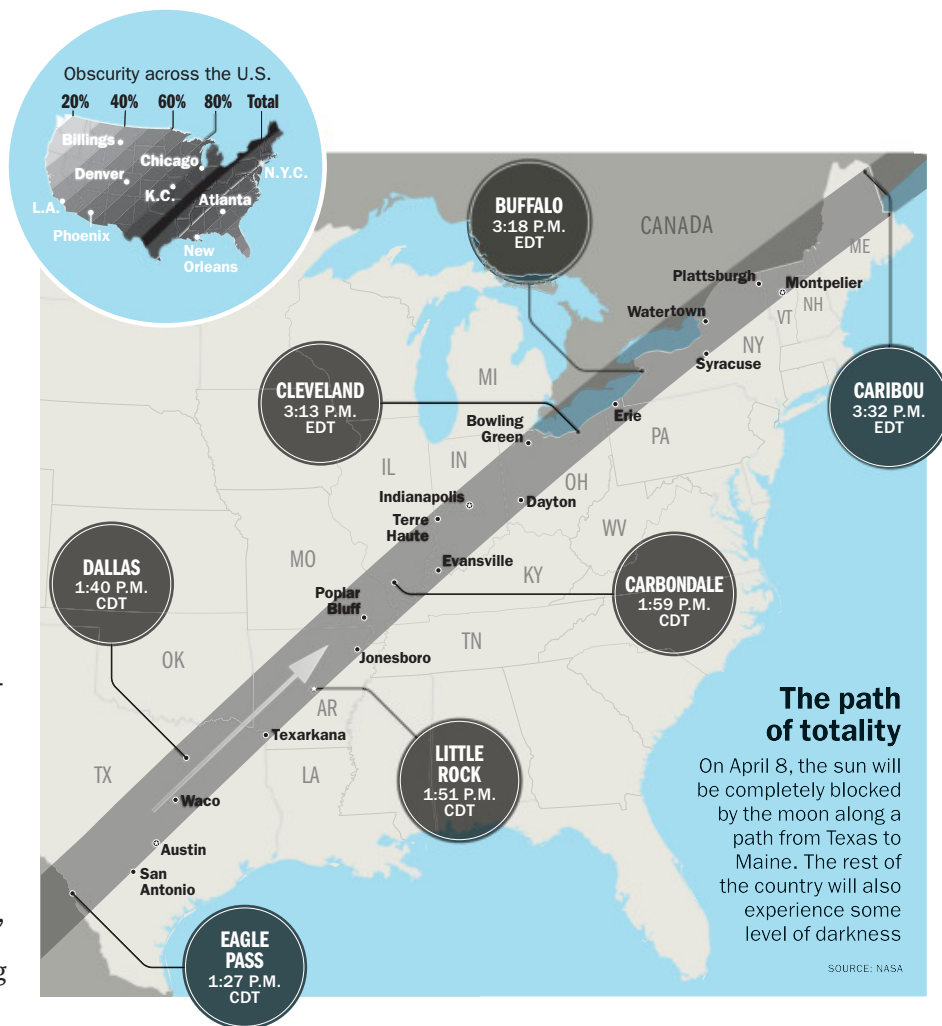
BY JEFFREY KLUGER

OF ALL OF THE ANIMALS WORTH observing during a total solar eclipse, perhaps none are more intriguing than humans. They stop what they're doing; they stare skyward; they lower their voices to a hush. Some may even shed tears. Other species of animals display other kinds of behavioral changes, as the weather and lighting and nature itself seem to turn on their axes. And the total eclipse on April 8, which crosses the U.S. from the southwestern edge of Texas to the northern tip of New England, is no exception.

Some of the greatest changes during a total eclipse occur far above us, in the ionosphere, the band of atmosphere that ranges from an altitude of 37 to 190 miles. Defined by the abundance of electrically charged particles, or ions, the ionosphere is denser during the day, turbocharged by incoming radiation from the sun. That means during an eclipse, the overall concentration of ions in the ionosphere falls. This reduction can lead to a cooling of the upper atmosphere, which in turn can cause local depletions known as "ionospheric holes." Those cavities may disrupt radio signals and lead to anomalies in GPS navigation systems. But according to researchers, in most cases the disruption is transitory and too mild to notice.

Other natural changes are more universally detectable, not least the dimming of sunlight—the closer to the arch of totality, the deeper the darkness experienced. Temperatures can drop by anywhere from 5°F to 15°F as sunlight retreats. Falling temperatures may also cause what's known as an "eclipse wind," or a slowing of the winds. That's the result of low-level air becoming cooler than higher-level air, which makes it harder for that more-elevated atmosphere to mix with the air closer to the ground, eliminating the temperature and density differences that lead to breezes and gusts. As totality ends, the winds

**Some insects, bats, and birds emerge as the sky darkens**



pick back up. Another effect falling temperatures may have is the appearance of a fleeting thunderstorm, as cooler air closer to the ground pushes warmer, more humid air upward, where moisture then condenses and rains out.

All of this affects nonhuman animals in multiple ways. Insects, bats, and birds that feed at night emerge as the sky darkens. Birdsong tends to grow quieter as darkness descends. Crows, gulls, and sparrows that are in flight have been observed alighting on trees or on the ground and silencing any chirps, calls, or caws. Dogs may cower or exhibit other fearful behavior. Bees may return to their hives, and domestic horses and cows may move to their stables.

Perhaps more striking, though, was the behavior of a captive troop of chimpanzees at the Yerkes Primate Research Center on the campus of Emory University in Georgia, during an annular eclipse on May 30, 1984. As researchers observed, the animals moved to the highest point of a climbing structure in their enclosure and turned their faces upward toward the sun and the moon. The chimps remained that way until the skies began to brighten, when they descended from the structure. No one can ever say with certainty how they were experiencing what they were seeing—whether they felt their own form of curiosity or wonder. Clearly, though, they were captivated by it all. It is a reaction that is very much of a piece with what humans feel—one we may share with untold numbers of other species as the great solar sky show unfolds. □





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## THE BRIEF HEALTH

### How to respond to an insult, according to therapists

BY ANGELA HAUPT

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN stunned into silence by an insult—only to think of the perfect witty comeback two hours too late?

Of course you have, and there's a physiological reason why. "When someone says something offensive or harmful that hurts us or hurts a member of a community that's really important to us, our nervous system can get activated," says Kerry McBroome, a psychologist in Brooklyn. "The parts of the brain that are responsible for coming up with clever or witty things to say are just not online—they're nervous and sensing a threat."

That's why planning ahead is essential. "There's something really life-affirming about having something to say ready to go in your back pocket," McBroome says. Pulling off a sharp response can boost your confidence and "be such a source of pride."

We asked therapists to share their favorite comebacks that either invite additional dialogue or shut down the conversation.



### “Hey, flag on the play.”

When Ajita Robinson, a therapist in Bethesda, Md., is taken aback or confused by someone's words, she pulls out a sports term: “Hey, flag on the play.” **By flagging what someone just said, Robinson is making it clear that their words were out of bounds or require further clarification.** “Folks usually respond pretty well, like, ‘What are you noticing?’” she says. One of Robinson's clients, for example, recently went on a date with a man she thought was too sexually suggestive. The woman said, “Hey, flag on the play,” and he understood that he'd crossed a line. “It's lighthearted,” she says, “but sends a signal that the comment or interaction crossed a boundary.”

### “Could you repeat that? I don't think I heard you correctly.”

This line is particularly effective when you're in a group of people, or when someone mumbles something under their breath, says Amanda Stemen, a Los Angeles-based therapist who teaches mindful communication skills. “A lot of times when people say something rude, it's really impulsive.” **By asking them to repeat themselves—even if you had no trouble hearing them—you're extending an opportunity to rethink and rephrase what they said.** “Often, they'll realize there are a bunch of people around, and they don't want to say it louder, because the shame is going to kick in,” Stemen says. “It de-escalates the situation.”

### “What a wild thing to say out loud.”

McBroome's favorite comeback is useful when someone says something prejudiced or outright bigoted. She smiles and brightly responds, “Wow, what a wild thing to say out loud.” They rarely see it coming, she says. “By throwing them off their rhythm or startling them, they're able to question something they previously hadn't questioned.” She's found that **people often realize they should examine their bias and reflect on why something they thought was acceptable to say didn't go over well.**

### “You should come with a warning label!”

Your cousin keeps bringing up politics at a kid's birthday party. A friend's sense of humor makes the group feel uncomfortable. Aunt Gladys has decided it's a good time to dispense diet tips. To handle these unwanted conversations, Kaytee Gillis, a psychotherapist in Lansing, Mich., sometimes opts for a lighthearted response: “You should come with a warning label!” **It makes people laugh, she's found—diffusing a potentially tense situation while letting them know they're crossing into inappropriate territory.** Most people successfully get the message that they should change their tone.

### “I don't get it. Can you explain the joke?”

Perhaps you're eager to shut down the conversation, especially around an inappropriate “joke.” Asking the person to explain what's so funny is a terrific way to hold them accountable for their behavior, says Kristen Suleman, a therapist in Houston: “They might think twice next time.” **She recommends delivering your question with genuine interest while trying to maintain compassion.** The goal isn't to humiliate the other person or appear holier than thou, Suleman says—it's to create curiosity about the purpose of their comment.

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LIGHTBOX

## Encoiled entry

An immigrant who crossed the Rio Grande into Eagle Pass, Texas, encounters spiraling razor wire on March 17. The barriers were one of Governor Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star migrant-deterrence initiatives, which also include arresting those suspected of crossing illegally. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in January that Customs and Border Protection agents could remove the wire, but Abbott ordered officials to continue layering coils.

Photograph by John Moore—Getty Images  
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# The View

WORLD

## RAMADAN IN GAZA

BY ABEER BARAKAT

Ramadan has a special place in every Muslim's heart. We wait for it all year. As a small child, I remember my excitement at hanging colorful lanterns on the house. My parents taught my siblings and me to abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk. But the holy month of Ramadan started early for Muslims in Gaza this year. In some sense, we've been fasting since October. ▶

INSIDE

THE PARALLEL LIVES OF  
POPULIST FORMER PRESIDENTS

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE COULD GO  
THE WAY OF ABORTION

IMMIGRANTS IN THE MAZE  
THAT IS IMMIGRATION

The idea of fasting is to train yourself to be patient, to elevate your soul from mundane desires, to try to free your mind from evil impulses and do good deeds for people around you. Nothing could have prepared me for Ramadan this year. I wasn't sure I would even survive until Ramadan—at least 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, according to the health ministry in the Strip, and 80% of the population has been displaced amid Israel's ongoing bombardment. For those of us lucky to still be alive, fleeing from place to place, we have undergone a partial fast for months, not wanting to eat the scant food of the families kind enough to shelter us, unable to find food to purchase in the markets or to afford what can be found.

Since the war began, my life has been turned upside down. My home in Gaza City, where my children and I used to hang Ramadan lights, is now destroyed and my family scattered.

**I WOKE ON MARCH 11**, the first day of fasting, an hour before dawn to prepare the pre-fast meal known as *suhour*. This is usually a moment of profound joy and spirituality, but this year I could not hold back my tears. The mosques lie in ruins, so neighbors all around performed the call to prayer on their own initiative. This *suhour* consisted of stone-hard bread, which I baked from barley, corn, soy, and even bird feed that we managed to find and ground together. The sand-like taste was tempered by the fact that we were able to dip it in the olive oil we had pressed from our own olive trees before the war, which I found in my father's deserted home in Gaza City. It pained me to not be able to offer food from a plentiful table to our neighbors, as is customary, and instructed by the Prophet Muhammad.

For our first meal after fasting, I had saved two small bags of pasta. Though it was infested with weevils, I managed to clean and boil the pasta, and serve it with tomato sauce for iftar. I used to partially prepare the next day's iftar the night before, so that my fasting hours could be focused on worship. With so much



*Palestinian children decorating their tents with Ramadan lanterns*

scarcity, this is now a faraway dream.

In years past, we would pray in the mosque after iftar and then visit our close relatives, sharing *qatayef*, a Ramadan dessert drenched in syrup. These visits would present an opportunity to forgive those who may have wronged us, strengthening our social fabric. With so many mosques destroyed, and no *qatayef* amid a dearth of food, I cannot celebrate with my parents, siblings, and their spouses and children. There are 20 of them all crammed into a one-bedroom apartment in Nuseirat in central Gaza.

Instead, my family spent the early part of Ramadan with friends, 16 of us in a small apartment to the north, in Gaza City. But we awoke one *suhour* to the sound of tank fire and heavy shelling, learning that Israeli soldiers had stormed the nearby Al-Shifa hospital. So we fled for the 11th time since the war began. All of us keenly feel the absence of friends and family seeking refuge scattered around Gaza. We all have extended-family members killed by Israeli airstrikes, tanks, or snipers.

Yesterday, my 18-year-old daughter Rana had a crying fit. When she finally calmed down, she asked, “Mom, for how long do we have to live in this nightmare? I want to go

home. I want to sleep in my bed and have my things around me.”

Rana has been strong throughout, telling jokes to lift our spirits and keep us calm through the bombardments. But starting a Ramadan filled with violence and sorrow, she said, pushed her over the edge.

It would be easy to lose faith when inhumanity surrounds us every day in Gaza. It may sound strange, but after surviving almost six months of brutal war, the start of the holy month has in some ways deepened my faith.

I wish this year that fasting were only about purifying our souls from the body's mundane desires. But, for us Gazans, it has also meant learning to live without many people we love. I hope they are in a better place now.

For those of us who live on, we also think of the homes and communities, built with love and care, that no longer exist. Even if, after Ramadan, the war finally comes to an end, as we are all fervently praying for, everyone in Gaza knows nothing will ever be as it was again.

*Barakat is a Ph.D. candidate in English, mother of four teenagers, and an activist for the welfare of Palestinian women and children*





THE RISK REPORT BY IAN BREMMER

## Bolsonaro and Trump, apart yet together

A PRESIDENT FACING A TOUGH fight for re-election warns his followers that corrupt elites want to steal power from them. He loses the election and calls on his supporters to defend him. Unable to block the transfer of power, he retreats to Florida. His supporters attack government buildings to protest the election result. Out of power, the former leader now faces criminal charges—and accusations that he's the one who tried to steal the last election.

He remains a formidable political force, one who will shape his country's politics for years to come.

This is the story of Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro.

There is one crucial difference between Bolsonaro's current position and that of former President Donald Trump. Courts in Brazil have ruled that his accusations that the country's voting machines were used to rig the election against him disqualify Bolsonaro from running for office for eight years. While Trump is the presumptive GOP nominee.

On March 1, a former army commander reportedly told federal police that Bolsonaro was considering issuing a presidential decree to revoke the results of the election he'd just lost. That account aligns with claims made by other former officials. Bolsonaro denies these charges.

His approval rating stands at 43%, up 10 points since he left office, and 38% of respondents tell pollsters the election was stolen from him. On Feb. 25, Bolsonaro held a peaceful rally

in São Paulo attended by an estimated 600,000 to 750,000 people. Major opposition leaders support Bolsonaro's message that he's a victim of persecution. (Unlike Trump, Bolsonaro has avoided criticizing courts and judges.)

Bolsonaro can't seek office again until at least 2030, but even if he ends up behind bars for some time, he will be the principal kingmaker for the opposition to Luiz Inácio

Lula da Silva's government for the foreseeable future. His supporters, like those attached to Trump and other charismatic populists, won't easily be moved by further accusations against their hero.

In years ahead, more populists will fuel election campaigns not on resentment of elite politicians, but on charges of conspiracy against those who would fight for the common people and a deep distrust of political institutions. The number of people who get their news from sources that algorithmically feed their biases will continue to grow. Authoritarian governments like those in China, Russia, and Iran will use digital weapons to exploit the divisions in Western democracies.

But the next major test of this strategy of populist defiance will come on Nov. 5, when more than 150 million Americans cast votes on the rematch between President Joe Biden and the man who says Biden stole the last election from him and the American people. □

**Out of power, the former leader now faces criminal charges**

# Where does the armpit end and the body begin?



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## The Leadership Brief By Edward Felsenthal

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN AND FORMER  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*Rachel Botsman, one of the leading experts on trust, believes we're thinking about it all wrong.*

### We hear a lot that trust is in decline.

**That's not your view, is it?** Trust is like energy—it doesn't get destroyed; it changes form. It's not a question of whether you trust; it's where you place your trust. In society today, trust is shifting from institutional trust to "distributed trust." Trust used to flow upward to leaders and experts, to referees and regulators. Networks, platforms, and marketplaces change that flow sideways to peers, strangers, and crowds, creating a dispersion of authority and fracturing of trust.

**How do you define trust?** "A confident relationship with the unknown." The more uncertainty, the more trust that you need.

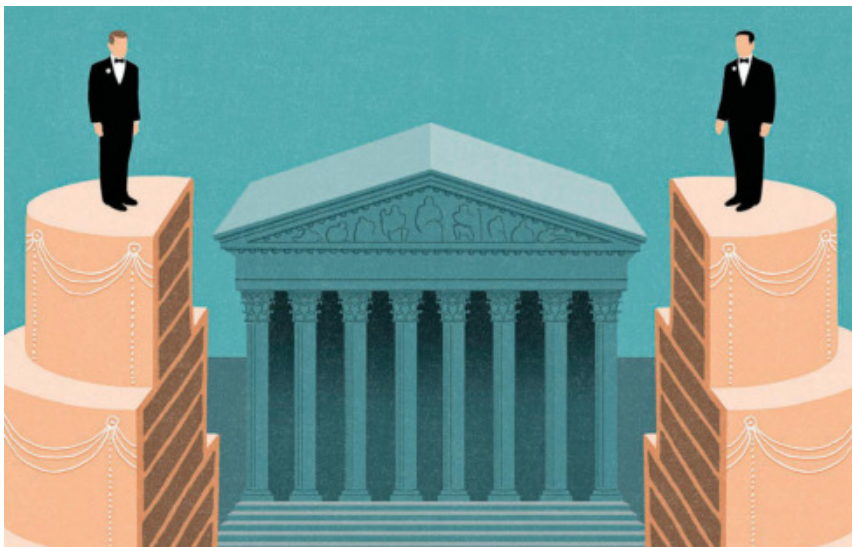
**So if we want to increase trust in society, we have to do more than mitigate risks.** Yes. I find it quite unsettling that when pressed for solutions, the default is often transparency. Let's make the media, algorithms, or the inner workings of government more transparent. But if that's the way we head, we've given up on trust. You're saying, "This is how this thing works. You can be certain about the processes. Therefore, you don't really need as much trust."

### What does your research say about the right way to build trust, in our institutions and in each other?

Deep trust forms based on how people behave. Above all it comes from integrity. How do you realign the public's belief and confidence that whatever this institution is, is serving their best interests?



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## The D.C. Brief By Philip Elliott

WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

WHEN THE SUPREME COURT overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Kelley Robinson was running the political shop at Planned Parenthood. Like many abortion-rights advocates, she'd seen the moment looming. Still, it felt like a personal and professional thwacking.

"Up until *Roe* was overturned—even after the leak that they planned to overturn *Roe* came out—we polled folks across the country and they still did not believe it was true," she says. "They just would not believe that the Supreme Court in our lifetime would actually overturn such a fundamental right that had been the law of the land for over 40 years."

Robinson is now president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization, and she fears she's watching the same slow-moving car crash all over again. Before 2015, marriage rights varied by state. With *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the court extended the federal right to marry to same-sex couples. It was a reflection of how views of same-sex relationships had shifted, and would continue to. But while polls have moved one way, the composition of the court has shifted in the other. **If *Roe* could fall after 49 years, there's no reason to think *Obergefell* is safer after less than a decade in effect.**

The legal breadcrumbs are not difficult to find. Justice Samuel Alito in particular has been sprinkling swipes at *Obergefell* in concurrences and dissents since 2020. And then there are the smattering of cases—mostly to do with trans rights—working their way through courts in red states. Any one of those reaching the nation's highest court could give the conservative majority a chance to undermine *Obergefell*, or wipe it out entirely, and with it, later rulings and rules that cite it as precedent.

If the red-blue divide that emerged for abortion rights is any guide, Americans would likely see a similar geographical split on access to same-sex marriage—and other antidiscrimination rules that rely on rights promulgated by *Obergefell*. The ripple effects would be massive and, for millions, heart-wrenching.

It's why Robinson is among those pushing Democrats to make the case that LGBTQ rights are on the ballot just as much as abortion. "This isn't just some sort of fantasy. This could actually be our reality unless we do something," she says. "It's why 2024 matters so much."



For more insights from Washington, sign up for TIME's politics newsletter at [time.com/theDCbrief](https://time.com/theDCbrief)



# TIME THE CLOSERS

On February 22, we gathered in New York City to honor influential Black leaders closing the racial wealth gap.

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LEFT TO RIGHT: FOUNDER, THE FIFTEEN PERCENT PLEDGE AND FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BROTHER VELLIES **AURORA JAMES**, FOUNDER, CHAIRMAN AND CEO, OPERATION HOPE **JOHN HOPE BRYANT**, WRITER, PRODUCER, ACTRESS AND ENTREPRENEUR **ISSA RAE**, U.S. SENATOR OF NEW JERSEY **CORY BOOKER**, ACTRESS, SINGER-SONGWRITER, HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE AND FOUNDER, TRANSTECH **ANGELICA ROSS**

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## IMMIGRATION

# America: Start here

BY JULIO TORRES

IF THERE'S ONE THING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ME, it's that I'm utterly unsuited for bureaucracy. I don't know my passwords to anything. I have thousands and thousands of unread emails. I don't open mail because I assume it'll be bad news. I've never had a credit card. But it's also something that, as a filmmaker and a writer, deeply fascinates me—how sterile, faceless, and universally isolating it all can be.

When I set out to make my movie *Problemista*, among the biggest things I wanted to explore was the relentless maze of American bureaucracy, particularly in the U.S. immigration system. It's a terrain I've had to traverse as a young college student from El Salvador in the early 2010s and one that the protagonist of the movie, Alejandro, has to navigate too. But I soon came to realize that I wasn't the only one on set who had been dealing with this: Laith Nakli—the actor who plays Alejandro's immigration lawyer—has been weaving through the twists and turns of this system for most of his adult life. A cosmic irony I couldn't unsee.

Laith is British Syrian and moved to the U.S. in the '90s. In his 20s, he got into bodybuilding and was caught moving a package of steroids—a favor that he was doing for his then coach. The offense culminated in his getting arrested and having to do 200 hours of community service. Laith ended up doing 400, and afterward he was on probation. For most people that would be the end of the story: a pretty small offense and a pretty low sentencing. Done and done after “paying his debt to society,” as they say. But for someone in Laith's position who's not from the U.S., this resulted in his having to reapply for a visa every year to continue to stay here.

Because of this, Laith is unable to leave the States. He hasn't been able to visit his family, and what's more, his blossoming career as an actor has a ceiling. Even though great opportunities come about, he has had to turn down jobs because they shoot abroad. And if you're working in the entertainment industry in the U.S., you know that more and more things are shooting all over the world.

I sympathize with this frustration a lot—the idea that as an immigrant in the U.S., you have an opportunity to go out and create something for yourself. But that “something” always has an asterisk. Much like Laith and Alejandro, I have also had moments in my life where there were limitations on what I could and couldn't do because of these invisible bureaucratic guardrails within the U.S. immigration system.

What many people don't realize is that navigating this system—and being a “successful” immigrant—is a second job. You have to get relentlessly creative to fill in the gaps in a broken system. The less money you have, the harder



From left: Nakli and Torres in *Problemista*; Torres in *Problemista*

it is. The less of a safety net you have, the harder it is. If someone is undocumented, then the corridors of that maze get narrower and narrower. This complicated puzzle is equally not in your control and one that you keep having to figure out. It's a game where the rules don't add up, one that no one can rationally defend and yet never changes.

**FOR DIFFERENT IMMIGRANTS** that looks different. The inability to secure employment is a very common challenge. In Laith's case, it's his restricted mobility. And for me, it was the frustration that came from seeing my peers live day by day and have the grace period to figure themselves out. For many years during college and after graduation, I felt like I was against the clock, and I had to figure things out very quickly or else I wouldn't be able to stay in the U.S. To top it all off, there was the added difficulty that my dream life wasn't to secure a stable job. I wanted to live a creative life.





In some ways, this is the same for Alejandro: this is a kid who has been protected his whole life in El Salvador, and now he wants to prove himself by becoming a toy designer in the U.S. (The irony being that he wants to prove himself by doing something so difficult to achieve his equally difficult dream.) When he meets the famous, domineering art critic Elizabeth (played by Tilda Swinton) and begins to work for her so that he might get a visa, he sees a challenge—the kind that he hasn’t had before. He doesn’t just want the piece of paper; this is a very specific person who wants to reach his goals in a very specific way.

**PROBLEMISTA IS NOT MEANT** to be a global thesis on immigration. It is not a documentary about policy. Rather, the movie came from a very specific point of view about the choices we make and what motivates us. The movie is, at least on the surface, about a young person who faces all the caveats, challenges, and rules

## The corridors of the maze get narrower

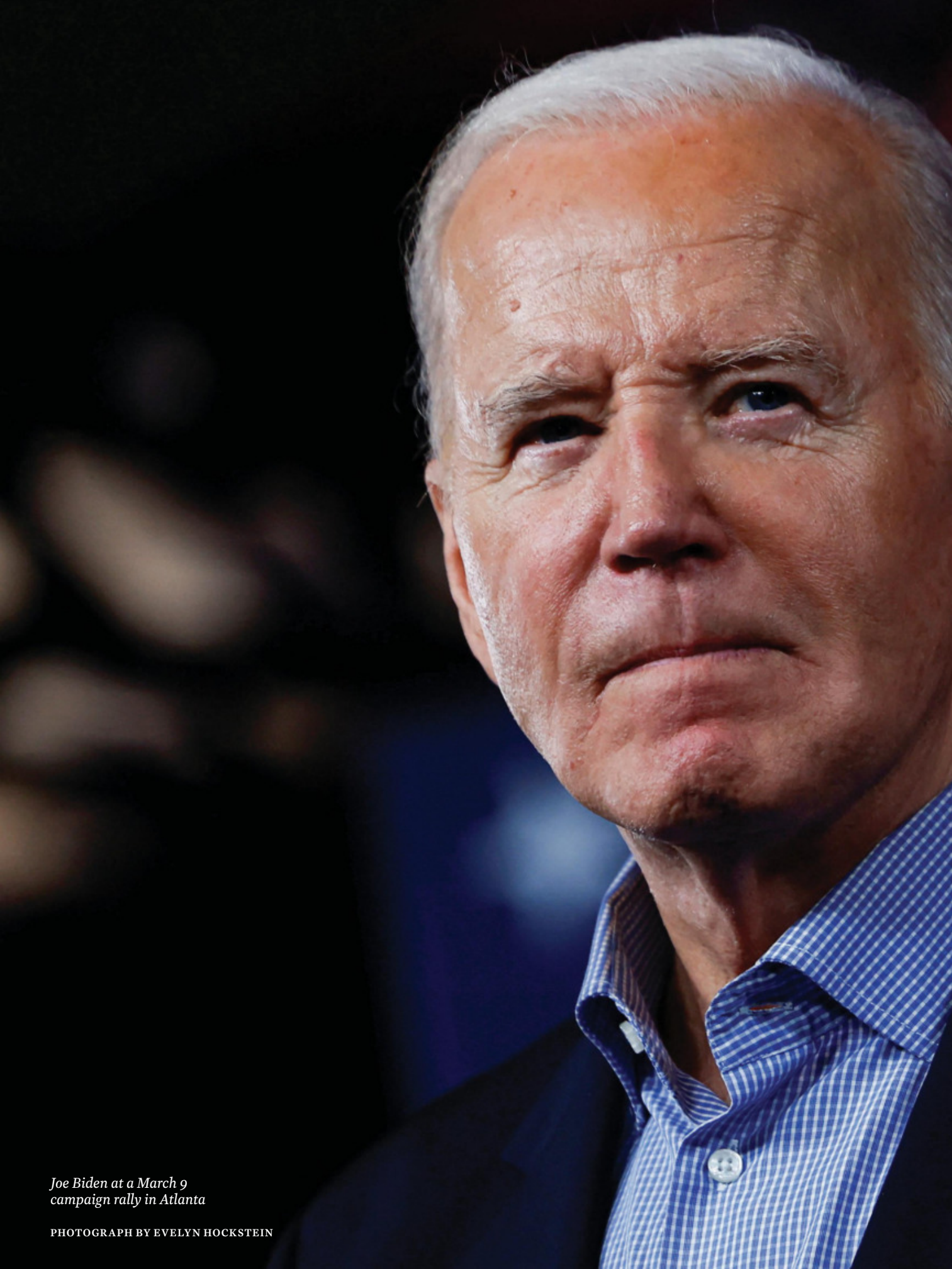
the immigration system throws at him. Through it all, he learns how to bend over backward and limbo-dance under the lasers into the life that he wants to live.

I hope it illuminates an experience that feels familiar to people—the feeling of being trapped in a system that you have no say in. Because it’s not exclusive to the experience of the immigrant. Think about those who don’t have health insurance and have to navigate the medical system. Or those who are in debt. All of these are impossible systems, with rules no one seems to agree on.

This movie is also about looking at what happens when someone gets help. It’s looking at what happens when we have a little bit of empathy for one another and question why it is that people have to work so hard to achieve their dreams. Instead of cheering people up a ladder, it’s worth asking ourselves why there is a ladder in the first place.

It’s a question that I’m sure sends shivers down the spine of anyone who celebrates the idea that one must work hard and not complain. But what if working hard isn’t enough for so many? Laith achieved the near impossible—he booked highly coveted acting jobs. And yet he can’t move about the world freely because he made a mistake in the ’90s, one for which he’s already paid. Isn’t that a sign that something is broken? —As told to Rachel Sonis

*Torres is an actor, comedian, and director. Problemista is his feature filmmaking debut*



*Joe Biden at a March 9  
campaign rally in Atlanta*

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVELYN HOCKSTEIN



A close-up, profile view of Joe Biden's head and shoulders. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a blue and white checkered shirt. An American flag pin is visible on his lapel. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blue light spots.

POLITICS

# Operation Save Biden

The President's campaign  
is in trouble. Will the  
turnaround plan work?

By Charlotte Alter, Brian Bennett, and Philip Elliott

# Last June, Barack Obama slipped into the White House to deliver a warning to Joe Biden.

The state of Biden's re-election campaign was shaky, Obama told him over a private lunch, according to a Democrat briefed about the meeting. Defeating Donald Trump would be harder in 2024. The mood of the country was sour. Persuading unhappy voters was going to be difficult. Biden needed to move more aggressively to make the race a referendum on Trump, Obama advised.

The former President left believing the current one had gotten the memo. But over the next six months, Obama saw few signs of improvement. In December, he returned to the White House at Biden's invitation. This time, Obama's message was more urgent. He expressed concern the re-election campaign was behind schedule in building out its field operations, and bottlenecked by Biden's insistence on relying upon an insular group of advisers clustered in the West Wing, according to the same Democratic insider. Biden needed to get it together, or Trump would sweep the seven key battleground states in November, six of which Biden carried in 2020.

Three months later, the 2024 general election is under way, and Biden is indeed in trouble. His stubbornly low approval ratings have sunk into the high 30s, worse than those of any other recent President seeking re-election. He's trailed or tied Trump in most head-to-head matchups for months. Voters express concerns about his policies, his leadership, his age, and his competency. The coalition that carried Biden to victory in 2020 has splintered; the Democrats' historic advantage with Black, Latino, and Asian American voters has dwindled to lows not seen since the civil rights movement. Despite an attempted insurrection, 88 felony charges, and a record that prompts

former aides to warn of the dangers of reinstalling him in office, Trump has never, in three campaigns for the presidency, been in as strong a position to win the White House as he is now. If the election were held tomorrow, more than 30 pollsters, strategists, and campaign veterans from both parties tell TIME, Biden would likely lose.

As a fog of dread descends on Democrats, Biden's inner circle is defiantly sanguine. They see a candidate with a strong economy, a sizable cash advantage, and a record of accomplishments on infrastructure, climate change, industrial policy, and consumer protections that will register for more voters as the campaign ramps up. They see a pattern of Democrats overperforming their polling in recent years, from the 2022 midterms to a spate of special elections and abortion referendums. Most of all, they see a historically unpopular opponent. And in the end, they believe, voters dissatisfied with the President will tally the stakes—from reproductive rights to the prospect of mass immigration roundups to the future of U.S. democracy—and pull the lever for Biden again. "Our biggest strength is

'Our biggest strength is that 80 million people sent him to the White House before.'

—QUENTIN FULKS, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY CAMPAIGN MANAGER

that 80 million people sent him to the White House before," says Quentin Fulks, Biden's principal deputy campaign manager, who notes that Trump needs to find new voters to win. "Our challenge is winning people who have already cast a ballot for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris once."

Yet that may be a tall order in what's shaping up to be a contest of which candidate America dislikes less. After a slow start, Biden's campaign is charging forward, opening field offices, hiring staff, and launching an ad blitz painting Trump as a dangerous autocrat. But even if the President's sputtering bid finds a new gear, allies say, the country is so bitterly divided that his ability to affect the outcome in November may be limited. Both sides are digging in for a gloomy slugfest, marked by depressed turnout and apocalyptic warnings about the fate that awaits the nation should the other guy win. Publicly, Biden's brain trust is confident in their turnaround plan. Privately, even some White House insiders admit that they're scared.

**A LOT HAS CHANGED** for Aidan Kohn-Murphy in four years, but at 20 years old, he looks the same as he did in 2020—a round smiling face beneath a mop of dark hair. Though he wasn't old enough to vote in that election, Kohn-Murphy was the main organizer of #TikTokforBiden, the largest and most effective Gen Z social media campaign in support of the Democratic nominee. In the years since, #TikTokforBiden has transformed into the youth activist collective Gen Z for Change. And Kohn-Murphy has cooled on the President he worked tirelessly to elect.

It has nothing to do, as many assume, with the President's age. With palpable frustration, Kohn-Murphy enumerates the list of perceived policy "betrayals" as though they were "tattooed on the back of my hand." He's upset about Biden's inability to block construction of sections of Trump's border wall. He's upset about the Willow project, an oil-drilling operation that is proceeding on Alaska's North Slope despite Biden's campaign pledge to ban drilling on federal lands. And he's upset about Biden's sustained support of Israel amid its military campaign in Gaza, a position that





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*A protest in Michigan, where critics delivered a symbolic rebuke in the state's primary over Biden's handling of the war in Gaza*

has incensed legions of young progressives. In 2020, Biden clobbered Trump by 24 points with voters under 30. A New York Times/Siena poll conducted in December showed Biden trailing Trump by 6 points among the youngest cohort of voters, although subsequent polls have shown modest improvement. Gen Z voters “don’t understand why they should be compelled to cast their ballot for a candidate who has done so many things that are against their values,” says Kohn-Murphy. While he plans to cast a grudging vote for Biden, he’s worried that the threat of another Trump term won’t be enough to change the minds of his peers.

Young voters are not the only collapsing pillar of the party’s electoral coalition. Biden claims just 63% of Black voters, a sharp drop from the 87% he carried in 2020, according to polling by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University. After winning Hispanic votes by a ratio of 2 to 1 four years ago, he now trails Trump

among that voting bloc. Biden’s position on Israel amid the war in Gaza has tanked his standing with Muslim and Arab voters, particularly in must-win Michigan. Overall, Biden’s advantage over Trump among nonwhite Americans has shrunk from almost 50 points in 2020 to 12, according to the latest Times/Siena poll. “It boils down to voters of color, and those voters are pissed,” says one former Biden campaign and White House official, who, like others interviewed for this story, was granted anonymity to make candid appraisals about the President’s campaign. “I think it’s very likely he’ll lose.”

Incumbent Presidents are typically considered favorites for re-election, particularly those who have overseen a solid economy, as Biden has. Biden has a record to run on, beyond the bipartisan

infrastructure bill and historic investment addressing climate change; billions of dollars of student-debt forgiveness; lowering drug costs; passing bipartisan gun-safety legislation; and much more. To some allies, there’s an obvious explanation for the gulf between the President’s performance and political predicament: a White House and campaign team tasked with selling his success have fumbled the job.

In the key battleground state of Arizona, for example, at least two major semiconductor plants are being built thanks to the CHIPS Act, historic legislation Biden signed to invest more than \$52 billion in U.S. semiconductor manufacturing. Intel and Taiwan’s TSMC announced plans to create thousands of local tech and construction jobs, and the Greater Phoenix Economic Council estimates the investments will boost the regional economic output by billions. Yet only 25% of Arizona voters credit Biden for the new plants, according to polling from Noble Predictive Insights



provided exclusively to TIME; 29% credit the companies, while 34% say they're "not sure" who's responsible.

Biden isn't getting credit for his wins because his message has been too "academic," argues Representative Bennie Thompson, the Mississippi Democrat who chaired the House select committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. "So much of what's been said is going over the heads of the average American citizen. It doesn't need to be a dissertation. It just has to be a clear message. He's going to have to work on that."

Nearly two dozen senior Democratic sources tell TIME that Biden's campaign mechanics, structure, and staffing over most of the past year are partly to blame as well. While Obama was marching to re-election over the summer of 2012, his campaign head count topped 900. Despite plans to hire 350 new staffers, the Biden campaign ended 2023 with only around 70 paid employees, according to campaign finance filings. His team says it is relying heavily on the network of staff that the Democratic National Committee has been bolstering for state races since 2021. (Trump also reported around 70 people on his campaign payroll, although that tally fails to account for the fact that much of his brain trust is spread across nominally independent super PACs and a think tank.)

As Biden defenders point out, bigger is not always better. "On the Kerry campaign, they had a Noah's Ark—two of everything," says a Democratic consultant involved in that losing 2004 team. Hillary Clinton's ill-fated 2016 campaign had about 800 staffers, with an additional 400 at the Democratic National Committee and subsidies for almost 3,000 more within state parties. The overhead kept Clinton and her inner circle busy wooing donors rather than meeting with voters in crucial states.

For the critical role of campaign manager, Biden installed Julie Chavez Rodriguez, a White House senior adviser, who has never before run even a statewide race. Biden was slow to dispatch the architects of his 2020 victory over to the current effort; in January, he finally reassigned top aides Jen O'Malley Dillon and Mike Donilon from the White House to the campaign after a delay that left top Democrats, including

Obama, bewildered. But major strategy decisions are still routinely held up waiting for West Wing approval, a half dozen Democrats say.

The campaign has also been slow to build a field operation in key battlegrounds. In Georgia, a state he carried by fewer than 12,000 votes, Biden has one staffer. In North Carolina, where he came about 75,000 votes short of winning in 2020 and which now may present a pickup opportunity, the campaign has hired just three.

The result is a winnable race that risks being frittered away, some allies say. "This isn't that complicated. Call [Pennsylvania Governor] Josh Shapiro, [Michigan Governor] Gretchen Whitmer. Ask them who should be hired and what 20 things need to be done to win those states," laments a veteran Democratic consultant with experience guiding presidential nominees. "Don't assume what worked last time will work this one."

This complaint is echoed by scores of Democratic strategists, who see Biden as a politician captive to the past and content reprising a strategy that worked in the last election but looks increasingly ill-suited to the current one. "This is just who Joe Biden is," says another top Democratic strategist who worked for Biden and has grown frustrated by the candidate's reliance on longtime

**‘Does he want to win the argument, or win the election?’**

—MICHAEL LAROSA, FORMER PRESS SECRETARY FOR FIRST LADY JILL BIDEN





aides who deride outside critics. “This is how he’s always run his campaigns. He and his insiders know better. Last time, it worked, so he didn’t learn any of the lessons, and thinks he can run 2020 again.”

*From left: Senators applaud Biden’s State of the Union speech; Biden supporters at a March 8 rally in Philadelphia; Chavez Rodriguez at campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Del., on Feb. 3*

**AS AIR FORCE ONE** flew through turbulence on the way back from a March 9 campaign rally in Atlanta, Chavez Rodriguez was upbeat. Sitting in a high-backed leather chair, a blue Biden-Harris T-shirt peeking from under her gray blazer, Chavez Rodriguez rattled off the reasons for optimism. A big one is money. The Biden machine has built a formidable war chest, with \$155 million on hand. Trump’s team hasn’t released comparable numbers yet, but his campaign and the Republican National Committee had about \$40 million in January.

Chavez Rodriguez and her team viewed Biden’s fiery State of the Union speech as the starting gun of the campaign. Up next: a six-week, \$30 million blitz of TV ads in battleground states that aim to define Trump as a threat to democracy and reproductive rights, while tackling the delicate issue of Biden’s age. The campaign has also begun rolling out its field operation; in addition to the new staffers, it plans to open 100 campaign offices in states like Arizona, Michigan, Nevada,

North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. “It’s about getting the boots on the ground,” Chavez Rodriguez says, “and building the ground game that we need to in all of our battleground states.”

A constellation of outside groups are also bringing cash and organizational clout to the fight. The 400,000-member-strong United Auto Workers has endorsed Biden, as have 18 other labor unions. At the Atlanta event, political action committees for Asian American, Black, and Latino voters—the AAPI Victory Fund, The Collective, and the Latino Victory Fund—together pledged \$30 million toward boosting turnout for Biden. And a pro-Biden super PAC, Future Forward, has \$250 million in fall advertising teed up in seven key states, which strategists say is the biggest single super PAC ad play in history.

The campaign is recruiting thousands of volunteers to connect with voters in their communities about Biden’s record, including through a digital platform called Mobilize.us that helps volunteers set up online events with friends. That multimillion-dollar push,

which began in March, will run through the summer. In September, Fulks says, the campaign will shift gears to deliver supporters to the polls, employing everything from door-to-door canvassing to targeted social media, as well as the robust ground games of labor unions and abortion-rights groups.

The campaign is moving advertising dollars away from traditional broadcast channels and toward digital platforms like YouTube, Google search, Facebook, and online sports-streaming sites, where more voters spend their time, says Rob Flaherty, who oversees the campaign’s digital strategy. Despite Biden’s vowing to sign legislation that could ban TikTok if it doesn’t divest from Chinese ownership, his campaign joined the platform in February, churning out clips with titles like “4 insane policies in a 2nd Trump term” and “What is Trump saying lol.” As it works to court bold-faced names like Taylor Swift, Biden’s digital staff plans to tap local influencers in key voting districts who may have only a few thousand followers, but can carry the message to targeted communities.

When it comes to the President’s dismal numbers with young and nonwhite voters, the Biden brain trust recognizes the challenge but doesn’t share the panic of the party brass. To their mind, people who have cast a ballot for Biden before

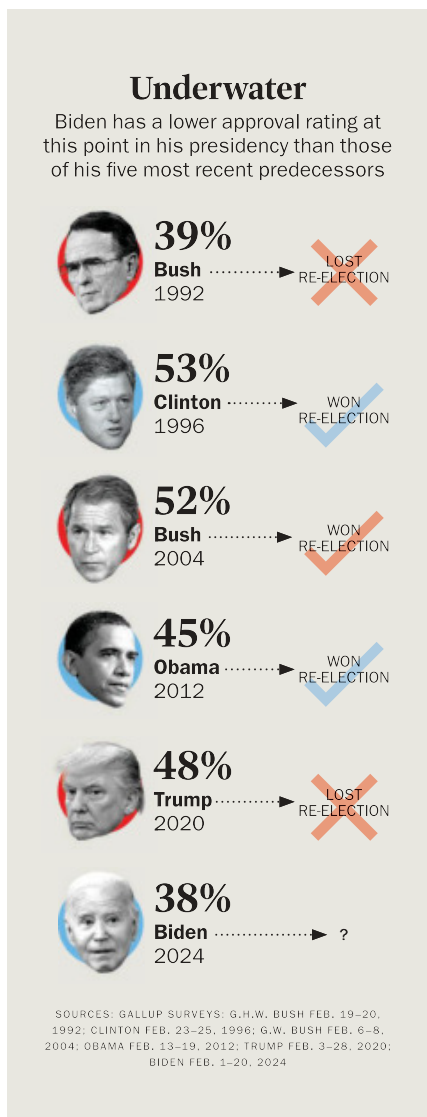
can be persuaded to do so again. “We’ve reached out to this group of nonwhite and young voters earlier than any presidential campaign ever has,” says senior adviser Becca Siegel. The campaign’s internal polling has found that young and minority voters have not tuned in to the election yet and haven’t thought about Trump in a while.

In the meantime, Biden’s team has devised strategies to engage key voting blocs in different ways. To reach Black voters in Georgia, the campaign plans to deploy surrogates like Senator Raphael Warnock, a pastor who preaches from Martin Luther King Jr.’s former pulpit, to juice turnout. Despite the sharp criticism of Biden coming from some voters of color, operatives predict Black voters in particular will stick with the President. “Black voters never loved Biden,” says Nsé Ufot, an organizer who helped deliver Georgia in 2020 by driving up Black turnout. “As the pragmatic political actors they have proven themselves to be, they will make the best decision based on the choices they have.”

Indeed, the biggest reason for optimism in Biden World may be the weakness of his opponent. As Election Day nears and Trump’s speeches and ideas garner the kind of attention they haven’t had since he left office, advisers expect fair-weather Biden supporters will remember how much they dislike his predecessor. “We know the work that we need to do to consolidate our base,” says the campaign’s communications director Michael Tyler. “The campaign is geared toward those efforts, while our opponent is still screaming into an echo chamber of MAGA extremism.”

The cornerstones of the case against Trump will be the dual threat he presents to democracy and reproductive rights. Since the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision, 21 states have stricter abortion restrictions than they had under *Roe v. Wade*. Democrats see an opportunity to pummel Trump on abortion access, as well as concerns about access to in vitro fertilization after the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are legally children.

That push is designed to target women like Kelsey Lawrence, a 30-year-old mother of four living in Front Royal, Va. Lawrence thought of



herself as having conservative and libertarian views before *Dobbs*. “I think every woman should have autonomy over her body,” Lawrence explained as she waited for Biden and Harris to take the stage at a January rally in the Northern Virginia exurb of Manassas. Democrats plan to continue tying unpopular abortion restrictions to the GOP; in January, the Biden campaign released an ad featuring a Texas doctor who was forced to leave the state to abort a non-viable pregnancy. In March, Harris became the first sitting Vice President to visit an abortion clinic.

The campaign is gaming out different paths to the 270 Electoral College votes it needs to win. One is to rebuild

the Blue Wall, which includes the traditional Democratic strongholds of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and then capture another toss-up state. A second route cuts through the Sun Belt—Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina. Democrats are pushing to add an abortion-access measure to the ballot in Arizona that they believe would drive up turnout for Biden. The same may be said for a polarizing GOP nominee for governor in North Carolina. Some Democrats aren’t ready to abandon hopes of Biden’s putting Trump’s current home state of Florida within reach. The paths to a win are varied enough that a major Democratic PAC is spending almost \$4 million in the Omaha TV ad market, where Harris’ husband Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff hosted political events in March in hopes of shaving off a single Electoral College vote in Nebraska’s Second District.

**FOR ALL THEIR** meticulous planning, Biden’s team knows the race could hinge on factors outside their control. Four years ago this March, the sudden spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. shut down the economy and paralyzed the presidential campaigns. Without the pandemic, Trump could well have won. Any number of unpredictable events—the state of the war in the Middle East, foreign election interference, gas prices, persuasive AI-enabled deepfakes, the uncertain schedule of Trump’s trials—could shape the outcome to a greater degree than what the candidates do between now and November.

Allies are still hopeful for a more forceful performance from the President himself. It’s no secret that Biden, 81, is the oldest Commander in Chief in U.S. history, or that broad swaths of the country believe he’s no longer up to the job. The White House has tried everything it can—perhaps to a fault—to cosset him. Aides tend to avoid scheduling events in the early morning and evenings, limit his interviews and press conferences, and have him ascend the short stairs when boarding Air Force One to avoid any more embarrassing stumbles arising from his stiff gait.

But for Biden to beat the 77-year-old Trump, some allies believe it’s time





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*Allies remain hopeful that Biden, in the Oval Office on March 1, can deliver a more forceful performance*

to remove the bubble wrap. After campaigning successfully in 2020 on promises to restore the “soul of the nation,” Biden still clings to a self-image as a champion of comity. It is a pitch calibrated for an idealized electorate, not the one he has to win over. “People say, ‘I’m not going to vote for Trump, but I don’t know if I can vote for Biden.’ And everything they say has to do with his style: ‘He doesn’t seem to be fighting for us,’” says Representative Jim Clyburn, the former House Democratic whip, who has stepped away from his caucus leadership role to help Biden sharpen his message, urging the campaign to underscore the direct economic benefits of the Biden presidency.

Michael LaRosa, a former press secretary to First Lady Jill Biden, says the President has the capacity to author a comeback if he starts throwing punches. “He can talk about all of the accomplishments, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and economic-growth reports he wants,” LaRosa says. “Trump is talking

about illegal migrants killing gorgeous young students jogging on campus, or the price of groceries, and placing the blame for both at Biden’s doorstep. Does he want to win the argument, or win the election?”

Recent flashes of fight have cheered the President’s supporters. After the boisterous State of the Union speech, he hit the road for a two-week swing through seven battleground states. The first event was at a middle-school gym in the Philadelphia suburbs, where Biden said Trump “got his wish” when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* and states installed abortion restrictions. The President ticked through highlights of his record: limiting monthly insulin costs for seniors to \$35; capping all Medicare prescription-drug costs at \$2,000 a year; cutting credit-card late

fees from \$32 to \$8; requiring corporations to pay a minimum of 15% in tax. When Biden called for an assault-weapons ban and stripping liability protections for gunmakers, the room erupted in cheers. After stepping off the stage, he shook hands and posed for selfies for 30 minutes, ignoring multiple announcements from his staff that it was time to leave.

When he finally did, the scene greeting him outside was a reminder of the challenge ahead. On the street in front of the school, dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters, holding signs reading CEASE-FIRE NOW, erupted in chants of “Genocide Joe.” The protesters had camped there for hours as the sun set, waiting for their chance to get Biden’s attention. As his limousine pulled away, the crowd increased the volume of their chants, hoping the President would hear them from inside his armored car. —*With reporting by LESLIE DICKSTEIN, SIMMONE SHAH, and JULIA ZORTHIAN* □



DESERT





The United Arab Emirates—  
using oil wealth and its citizens’  
data—is betting on AI to project  
influence beyond its borders

By Billy Perrigo/Dubai

# POWER

AT AN AI RESEARCH LAB ON THE EDGES OF Abu Dhabi last year, an international team of 25 computer scientists were putting the finishing touches on a deep learning algorithm before sending it to be trained on 4,000 powerful computer chips. The AI system, which cost several million dollars to train, was funded by an arm of the Abu Dhabi government called the Advanced Technology Research Council (ATRC).

Despite the government’s substantial investment, ATRC secretary general Faisal Al Bannai decided to release the finished model online for free. If it was as good as the team believed, the boost to the United Arab Emirates’ reputation would be all the return the government needed on its investment, he reasoned. The plan worked. When the AI, named Falcon after the UAE’s national bird, was publicly released last September, it became a sensation. By some measures it was the best open-source large language model (LLM) available in the world at that point, outperforming top offerings from Meta and Google. Before Falcon’s release, “we were not on the map,” says Al Bannai. But “with 25 people, we did that. And it really created a surprise.”

Around the world, computer scientists took notice. “The UAE was not well known, before, for training models,” says Philipp Schmid, an AI researcher at the machine-learning platform Hugging Face based in Germany. “But then, by more or less the next day, we knew that they can train models, they open-source their models, they publish research around it, which benefits all.”

Falcon seemed to be the first sign of the UAE’s rapid rise in the world of AI. In this realm, the U.S. and China are the world’s undisputed heavyweights. But, sandwiched between the two superpowers, the United Arab Emirates is beginning to

ILLUSTRATION BY  
THE HEADS OF STATE  
FOR TIME

punch above its weight. The tiny Gulf nation of some 10 million, which appointed the world's first AI minister in 2017, is betting big on the technology as an engine for diversifying its economy away from oil, and for projecting geopolitical influence beyond its borders. In recent months, some of Silicon Valley's most powerful CEOs have visited the UAE, from Microsoft's Satya Nadella to Nvidia's Jensen Huang.

But while solidifying the Emirati government's belief that it has what it takes to become an AI power, Falcon also made a larger point: if this powerful new technology is indeed to usher in a new world, it will be shaped by those with the greatest wealth and power in the one that currently exists.

Emirati officials point to their advantages: Huge cash reserves to pay for top-tier "compute," or computing hardware. Enough electricity—powered by oil, natural gas, and solar—not only to power that hardware, but also to make building new data centers more attractive than in Europe and other parts of Asia, where grids are battling energy bottlenecks. And though most of the 88% of the foreigners who populate the UAE toil at low-wage jobs, officials express confidence that year-round sun and the absence of income tax can attract the world's top AI researchers, who are in high demand.

If they come, it would be to join an effort unhindered by internal critics, or other essentials of democracy. The Emirati state has spent the past two decades digitizing government services, and authorities here have a more permissive attitude than those in many Western countries to using citizens' anonymized data for training AI. In fact, the UAE casts its autocratic, state-capitalist government as a plus—giving it the ability to quickly marshal its significant resources to achieve what it sees as an epochal project. "What we have in the UAE that's going to give us an advantage is the decisionmaking power to make it happen," says Al Bannai, the official in charge of the ATRC. "Yes, you need some checks and balances. But in many places it is overdone."

Abu Dhabi's ruling family controls several of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, worth a combined total of some \$1.5 trillion. Those funds have historically been used as vehicles to diversify the UAE's oil wealth into growth industries, making them a perfect match for leaders of AI companies seeking the capital necessary to participate in the AI race. The country is also emerging as a player to watch in the world of difficult-to-produce computer chips used to train powerful AI systems. In February, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman met with investors seeking up to \$7 trillion to build an AI chipmaker that could compete with market leader Nvidia, the *Wall Street Journal* reported. Prospective investors included Sheik Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who controls Abu Dhabi's main sovereign wealth fund and is a brother of the UAE President.

If successful, the efforts could catapult the UAE to a position of outsize influence in the world of AI. (The country will have competition. Saudi Arabia, its larger neighbor, is earmarking \$40 billion for a push into AI, a sum that would make it one of the largest investors in the space, the *New York Times* reported on March 19, citing unnamed sources.) The UAE has already found itself caught in geopolitical crosswinds, especially as tensions rise between the U.S. and China over advanced semiconductors, the chips Washington is trying to keep from Beijing. "It's the transfer of technology, information, and intelligence

PENG XIAO,  
CEO OF G42,  
AND SATYA  
NADELLA, CEO  
OF MICROSOFT,  
IN ABU DHABI  
ON NOV. 2



OPENAI CEO SAM  
ALTMAN APPEARS  
VIA VIDEO CALL AT  
A CONFERENCE IN  
DUBAI ON FEB. 13



to China that the U.S. is really concerned about," says Neil Quilliam, an expert on Gulf geopolitics based at the London international-affairs think tank Chatham House. "The U.S. has basically been saying to the UAE: Don't go down that path. That's going to cross the line with us."

**AT A RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT** lab in Dubai on a rare rainy evening in February, the UAE's AI Minister Omar Al Olama sits down to discuss the nation's AI ambitions. On the other side of a glass wall separating the meeting room from the lab floor, an autonomous delivery robot designed by government-funded researchers lies dormant, the same bright white as the minister's *thobe*.

The 34-year-old Al Olama reels off a list of ways AI could improve the quality of life in the Gulf nation: reducing road traffic, improving hospital capacity, cutting down on state bureaucracy, even creating an AI-enabled tour guide for tourists. Increasing quality of life, Al Olama insists, is the main driver of the UAE's ambitions here. Economic growth is an incentive too. "We do believe that through artificial intelligence, we'll be able to expand our economic footprint and really become one of the big players in certain domains," he says.

Al Olama was just 27 when he was appointed to his role in 2017, and given the task of turning

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY MICROSOFT; SEAN GALLUP—GETTY IMAGES; KAMRAN JEBRELI—AP



▼  
OMAR AL OLAMA,  
THE UAE'S AI  
MINISTER, ATTENDS  
COP28 IN DUBAI  
ON DEC. 9



the UAE into a leading nation in AI by 2031. “Omar has unique credibility as the first AI minister on the global stage,” says Amandeep Singh Gill, the U.N. Secretary-General’s envoy on technology, who has worked closely with Al Olama on a U.N. effort to build global consensus on AI. “He’s very personable. Without airs, he moves in and makes friends with people. His youth is an essential part of that charisma.”

Al Olama has friendly relationships with diplomats and businessmen alike. Pacing the stage at the World Governments Summit (WGS) in Dubai in February, he joked with Altman, who appeared on the screen behind him via video call. “I’m looking to raise \$7 trillion, if you’re interested in joining,” Al Olama said, referring in jest to headlines that had broken the previous week. “If you figure out how to do that, please let me know,” Altman replied with a smile. “I’d be very

‘Part of the motivation is obviously finding a niche for the UAE.’

—Amandeep Singh Gill,  
U.N. Secretary-General’s  
envoy on technology

curious.” (WGS, where Al Olama is vice chair, is a media and event partner of TIME.)

Offstage, Al Olama is coy about the reports that Altman had attempted to raise funds equal to almost a third of U.S. GDP from investors including the UAE. “I’m not sure, to be honest, how real that is, the \$7 trillion project. I think someone might have misquoted either Sam or the UAE government on that. Seven trillion is an audacious number, to say the least.”

Still, Al Olama says, the UAE has the “ambition to proceed” in the direction of playing a

bigger role in global semiconductor manufacturing. The world, he says, “is looking for a decentralization of semiconductor production” beyond Taiwan, the geopolitical flash point in China’s backyard where most high-end chips are currently manufactured. The UAE’s working with the U.S. to expand that bottleneck “is going to be a win-win situation for everyone, because it ensures stability, it ensures economic cohesion between the UAE and the U.S.,” he says.

But Al Olama is most animated while discussing not hardware, but software. Falcon was released under an open-source license, and in February the ATRC committed \$300 million toward the Falcon Foundation, a nonprofit body to oversee the continued open-source development of the LLM series. The UAE’s commitment to open-sourcing AI has been a diplomatic success, winning it friends in Global South countries that would otherwise be shut out of costly AI development. “Part of the motivation is obviously finding a niche for the UAE, and national competitiveness,” Gill says. But “the UAE is interested in helping other countries access compute, access these open-source models, so that they can develop AI applications in their own contexts.”

A big part of the thinking behind the UAE’s open-source commitment, according to Al Olama, is to attract top AI researchers away from lucrative jobs at Silicon Valley tech companies by giving them a sense of purpose. “If you bring a person who is the top scientist in this field, and you tell him you have two options: either work for-profit, closed-source, and just benefit yourself, or work on something that’s open-source that will really change the lives of people, what would you decide?” Al Olama says. “We realized that the attraction of talent is much better when people actually believe this is for the greater good.”

The number of AI workers in the UAE quadrupled to 120,000 from 2021 to 2023, Al Olama recently told Bloomberg. “It is a place made out of heaven for researchers in AI,” says Al Bannai, the head of the Abu Dhabi government’s ATRC. “You have the compute, you have access to data, and you have the commitment to fund the research you’re doing. There aren’t many places that have all of this under one roof.”

But the UAE also faces challenges when attracting top researchers. For all its low taxes, sunshine, and glamour, civil liberties and internet freedoms in the UAE are subject to “significant” restrictions, according to Freedom House, which rates the country as “not free.” LGBTQ+ activity is criminalized, and labor abuses among the migrant workers brought in to support the UAE’s service and construction industries are well documented. The country is not listed among the top six where most elite AI researchers work, according to an analysis by researchers at the Paulson Institute think tank. Of the 14 authors named on the Falcon research paper, eight have LinkedIn profiles indicating that they are not based in the UAE. “Are they going to be able to attract talent to move to the UAE who can make a million-plus dollars anywhere?” says Dylan Patel, chief analyst at SemiAnalysis, an AI-industry monitor. “I’m skeptical.”

Still, officials in Abu Dhabi, the capital, remain bullish. Al Bannai says Falcon’s successors will be even more powerful—and not only because the government is willing to commit more money and computing power to the effort. “We have a third asset which we have not [yet] utilized,” he says. He is referring to private data that is not normally available on the internet, such as records held by hospitals and state-backed industries. “Try to go to some countries and get access to data to train,” Al Bannai says. “OK. Good luck.”

The UAE, he says, has permitted AI companies to train models on citizens’ medical data stripped of names and identifying information.

Similar efforts in countries like Britain have run into legal challenges and opposition in the press—just the kind of obstacles that, in the UAE, are easier to brush aside. “You can either debate forever or you can move,” Al Bannai says. “We have decided to move.”

**LAST SUMMER, OPENAI CEO ALTMAN** traveled to the UAE as part of a global tour capitalizing on the success of ChatGPT. “I am hopeful that the region can play a central role in this global conversation,” he told the crowd, praising the attendees who he said had been discussing AI since “before it was cool.”

Four months later, the UAE’s top AI firm, G42, announced a partnership with OpenAI. The companies would collaborate “to deliver cutting-edge AI solutions to the UAE and regional markets,” a post on G42’s website said, without disclosing specifics. At the top of the page, the post was illustrated with a photograph of a smiling Altman shaking hands with G42’s CEO Peng Xiao, apparently taken during Altman’s trip to the Gulf ear-

‘You can either debate forever or you can move. We have decided to move.’  
—Emirati official Faisal Al Bannai,  
on using private data protected  
in other countries

lier that summer. It was another illustrious partnership for the state-linked Emirati firm, which in 2023 signed a \$100 million deal with the California company Cerebras to build what it calls “the world’s largest supercomputer for AI training.”

Shortly after G42 announced its partnership with OpenAI, geopolitical tensions burst into the open. In November, the *New York Times* published a report detailing concerns within the U.S. intelligence agencies about G42’s ties to China. National-security officials, the report said, were concerned that advanced American technologies and sensitive data of U.S. citizens could make their way to China via G42, which had relationships with Chinese companies including Huawei. In a high-level meeting at the White House just days before Altman’s trip to Abu Dhabi, the Biden Administration had pushed the UAE to sever its links to Beijing, according to the *Times*. Two months later, it tightened rules on chip exports to an undisclosed list of Middle Eastern countries, amid concerns over the chips ultimately reaching China.

G42’s agreement with OpenAI may have been

less than it appeared. The Emirati firm had simply signed up to become one of OpenAI’s many enterprise clients, according to a person with knowledge of the matter. The agreement granted G42 access to OpenAI’s application programming interface, a tool that allows companies to integrate ChatGPT and GPT-4’s capabilities into their own apps. G42 is not an investor in OpenAI, and is bound by OpenAI’s usage policies, the person added. An OpenAI spokesperson declined to comment on the record.

Still, it was an example of the kind of relationships with foreign tech firms that the UAE government has long encouraged its domestic companies to enter into, according to Alexis Serfaty, director of geotechnology at the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group. “The idea there is to expand links into the global value chain and enable as much technology transfer as possible.”

In the months that followed the White House meeting, G42 began cutting its ties to China. The company said it was phasing out Huawei gear and had sold its roughly \$100 million stake in ByteDance, TikTok’s Chinese parent company. “We cannot work with both sides,” Peng told the *FT*. G42 did not respond to requests for comment.

Today, Emirati officials are keen to stress their closeness to Washington. “The UAE has been a strategic partner to the U.S. since our founding, we’ve gone through a lot,” says Al Olama. According to Serfaty, the UAE moved quickly to distance its tech industry from China’s because officials

considered it crucial to retain access to the high-end semiconductors subject to American sanctions. “Even if [the UAE is] uncomfortable removing themselves from Chinese hardware, ultimately, they want to ensure access to U.S. chips.”

When it comes to building new semiconductor factories, Altman has not denied that he is seeking funds for a new chipmaking venture. But he has urged skepticism of the \$7 trillion price tag reported by the *Journal*. “You shouldn’t believe everything you read in the press,” Altman said at an event on Feb. 21. “The kernel of truth is that we do think investing a lot of money in AI compute, energy, and data centers is going to be important to deliver the amount of services people want.”

The question is where the investment will happen. Taiwan, which dominates chip production now, is a democracy that’s vulnerable to China militarily. Gulf kingdoms share China’s autocratic model for governance but historically fall in line with Washington on security. “If they are able to diversify the existing supply chain, make it more resilient, that could certainly benefit the U.S.,” says Serfaty. “On the other hand, it depends on which foreign government [Altman] and his partners ultimately partner with, and that could very well conflict with U.S. national-security strategy.”

In the end, the U.S. government may have effective veto power over the UAE’s ambitions. Semiconductors are at the core of the Biden Administration’s CHIPS and Science Act, which includes billions in incentives for the onshoring of semiconductor manufacturing to the U.S. itself. Altman has reportedly met with U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo to seek her blessing for his project to create an Nvidia competitor, and has reportedly said he would not proceed without U.S. government approval. (The Commerce Department declined to comment.) Even if the UAE does stump up the money for new semiconductor factories, those factories may end up being located on U.S. soil.

Back in the government-funded R&D lab, Al Olama projects an air of confidence about the UAE’s future role in the AI landscape. “We always gravitate toward ambition as a country,” he says with a smile. “We are very ambitious people.” — *With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN □



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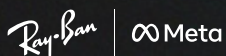
LEFT TO RIGHT: ACTOR, SINGER-SONGWRITER **ANDRA DAY**, ACTRESS, ENTREPRENEUR, ACTIVIST, AND PRODUCER **TARAJI P. HENSON**,  
PROFESSIONAL TENNIS PLAYER **COCO GAUFF**, WRITER, DIRECTOR, AND ACTRESS **GRETA GERWIG**, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND  
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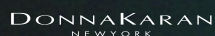
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# TIME Earth AWARDS 2024

**From the fashion runway to the rainforest, this year's honorees are using their influence to demonstrate leadership in shaping a more sustainable future.**

**Jane Fonda** Along with two Oscars, the **ACTOR AND ACTIVIST** has five civil-disobedience arrests for climate protests at the U.S. Capitol.

**Robert D. Bullard** Over the past 45 years, the **FATHER OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL-JUSTICE MOVEMENT** laid the path for a new generation.

**Gabriela Hearst** The Uruguayan **SUSTAINABLE-FASHION DESIGNER** produced the first carbon-neutral runway show and, as of 2019, has an entirely plastic-free company.

**John Kerry** After playing a key role in shaping global climate policies as the **FIRST U.S. SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY FOR CLIMATE**, the veteran politician has left the White House to galvanize the private sector in accelerating the clean-energy transition.

**Nemonte Nenquimo** Having won an order to halt drilling in Ecuador's Yasuní National Park, the **WAORANI LEADER AND CO-FOUNDER OF AMAZON FRONTLINES AND CEIBO ALLIANCE** works to see it enforced.

# jane Fonda

EVERY GENERATION MUST JOIN THE FIGHT

By Stephanie Zacharek

**JANE FONDA, AT 86**, is small-boned and elegant, her eyes like soft blue-gray flannel. Yet it's startling how much energy shoots through her via a simple handshake: if a woodland creature could shake your hand, it might feel like this, the will of an entire forest ecosystem pouring through one being. She's physically strong, sitting up straight and tall for more than an hour on a backless ottoman, perched before a cozy sitting-room fireplace in her Los Angeles town house. But the message telegraphed by her handshake is less a matter of muscle tone than of pure urgency. If you could put it into words, it would be this: There's not much time left.

Fonda has already lived many lives. The daughter of a much loved actor and a socialite, Henry Fonda and Frances Ford Seymour, she has built an astonishing acting career herself: In the space of just a few years, she shifted from the campy delights of *Barbarella* to career-defining performances in *Klute* and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Younger audiences know her from the *Book Club* movies and the hit TV series *Grace and Frankie*. And although it's now common for actors to support causes they care about, vocally and financially, Fonda is the OG actor-activist. In the early 1970s she supported Native American causes and spoke out on behalf of the Black Panthers. She's fought for civil rights and issues directly affecting women's welfare, though she may be best known for her anti-Vietnam War stance in the 1970s—in particular, a photograph of her perched on an antiaircraft gun taken during a 1972 trip to Hanoi. Fonda has apologized repeatedly and profusely over the years for that photo, knowing how hurtful it was to GIs and veterans. She knows what it's like to be embattled, and to go to battle for principles she believes in. But in 2019 Fonda had a breakthrough that, as she describes it, was bigger than any revelation she's had in decades of both acting and activism.

She'd felt a growing sense of alarm a year earlier, during the 2018 California wildfires. "The skies here were orange-brown," she recalls. "I read that birds were dropping dead

out of the sky over New Mexico and Arizona. They couldn't make their normal migratory journey over the coast because of the wildfires. So they were flying over the deserts, and they were dying of dehydration and hunger." Fonda spent her early years in the hills of California in the 1940s when there were no freeways and no smog. She remembers the sounds of meadow-larks, nightingales, mourning doves. "You don't hear them anymore. I went into a downward spiral. I realized, it's happening now. This isn't something in the future. I've marched, I've protested. But given my platform, I'm not doing what I can do. And this could be the end. I have to commit myself more."

Fonda's resolve intensified when the galleys for Naomi Klein's 2019 Green New Deal manifesto *On Fire* landed on her doorstep, just as she was heading off to Big Sur for Labor Day weekend. She was so shaken by Klein's book that she immediately called Annie Leonard, then head of Greenpeace USA. "This was not a cause," says Fonda. "This was not a specific war in a specific place, or a specific group of people fighting for rights. This was human civilization we're talking about. I just realized it in the core of my body. This is the moment I have to completely show up with everything I have." We're the first generation to experience the climate crisis, she says, and we're the last that can do anything about it. "I want to be part of the generation that does something about it, because this is it."

**FEELINGS OF DESPAIR** are understandable in the face of imminent climate disaster. But they can also be a retreat, a means of leaving the hard work of changemaking to someone else. It's not in Fonda's nature to feel that kind of helplessness: "I've never despaired before. I'm not a despairing person." But not even she knew exactly what she ought to be doing, which is why she called Leonard, who promptly set up a call with Klein, climate activist Bill McKibben, and environmental lawyer Jay Halfon. "I wanted to raise a ruckus," Fonda says. So together, the group came up with the idea of planning an act of civil disobedience every Friday, inspired by protests like Randall Robinson's 1980s antiapartheid sit-ins outside the South African embassy, as well as by





the actions of Fridays for Future, the youth movement organized by Greta Thunberg in 2018. Young people, Fonda says, “were asking for us. They were saying, ‘We didn’t create this crisis, but it’s our future that’s going to be destroyed. Where are the older people to join us?’ So I said, ‘I’m here. I volunteer.’”

The first Fire Drill Friday was held on Oct. 11, 2019, with Fonda appearing on the steps of the Capitol in a black-and-white houndstooth newsboy cap and a three-alarm-red coat. Only about 50 people showed up to hear the speakers and experts who’d been scheduled to appear, though that number would swell in the coming weeks. Fonda was arrested that day—photos show her holding her zip-tied wrists high, a badge of honor. And although this wasn’t her first arrest (she’d been arrested once in 1970, at the behest of the Nixon White House on suspicion of drug possession, and several times by military police during anti-Vietnam War protests), it was the first time she’d been detained for civil disobedience.

She would be arrested a total of five times—spending one night in jail—across the 14 Fire Drill Friday protests held in D.C. through Jan. 10, 2020.

The pandemic forced Fire Drill Fridays to move its protests and educational sessions online, and though the last virtual event was held on Jan. 5, the movement’s momentum continues. One thing Fonda learned from the experience is that Americans do care about climate issues. Data collected by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in autumn 2023 show that an estimated 72% of Americans believe climate change is happening, and some 70% believe it will harm plants and animals as well as future generations of humans. The whole point, Fonda says, is to let people know they’re needed. As attendance at Fire Drill Fridays grew, it was,

Fonda says, mostly older women who showed up, “women who’d never been to a rally before.” When people are asked why they haven’t taken any action in response to the climate crisis, the answer, Fonda says, is often simply that nobody asked them. “So I say the great unasked is our target. Let’s turn that concern into action.”

**WHEN YOU SPEND AN HOUR** or two with a person who cares passionately about a particular issue, their idealism tends to fill the air, sometimes to the point of crowding out the human being sitting in front of you. This is even somewhat true of Fonda, not because there’s anything recessive about her, but because her mission seems to have set every molecule of her being ablaze. She’s the same Jane Fonda we think we all know—and yet more. She speaks of how the climate crisis affects women

more negatively than men, particularly in the Global South. She makes a brief reference to her own recent cancer diagnosis—she was treated for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2022 and is now in remission—as a springboard to talk about the prevalence of cancer in commu-

nities located near refineries, oil wells, and fracking facilities, not to mention the fossil-fuel pollution that surrounds us all. She speaks with urgency about the upcoming election, whose outcome could determine the fate of the planet. In 2022, she and a small board of advisers established the Jane Fonda Climate PAC to help elect “climate champions,” particularly down ballot, where, she says, “the robust work on climate is happening. Mayors, city councils, boards of supervisors, county executives ... are the people that can create a whole climate plan, make it more resilient in your city or community.”

The political action committee is already in high gear for this year’s elections. Candidates are begging for its endorsement, and Fonda says they go through a rigorous vetting process—

and they absolutely cannot take money from the fossil-fuel industry. “This is probably the most important election. The problem is we say this all the time, only this time it’s really true. Who gets elected in the United States in November is going to greatly determine whether there’s a future.”

But even Fonda, whose passion and commitment are so exemplary, is more than just the sum of the issues she cares about. In her book *What Can I Do? My Path From Climate Despair to Action*, she writes of being in that jail cell and wondering what the late Tom Hayden, a brilliant activist and one of her three ex-husbands, would think of her. He was a great strategist. How would he advise her and her compatriots to proceed? In the next paragraph, though, she wonders if she would have had the nerve to move to D.C. and launch a project as ambitious as Fire Drill Fridays if Hayden were still alive. When I ask her about this moment of self-questioning, she replies, more mischievously than evasively, “Did I say that? Hmm.” Then she elaborates.

“I was in awe of Tom. His intellect, the depth of his understanding of what needed to happen and how to make it happen. I was always kind of in the student role with him. And I don’t think he respected me very much, or at least he made me feel that I was stupid. And so I think he would have probably tried to talk me out of it. Or I would have been afraid that he wouldn’t have approved.” The point of this story isn’t to paint self-doubt as weakness, but to show how getting beyond it is often what pushes any of us to leap further and higher than we ever thought we could go. “I guess one of the reasons I’m so involved is, I’m 86 years old. I have a feeling that people can say, ‘Look at what she’s doing at her age! If she can do it, I can do it.’”

The first step out of despair is simply showing up. We’ve already had brief moments last year where global average temperatures surpassed the 1.5°C temperature increase that scientists say we must avoid, she says. “But we can go back again—we can reduce it. It’s going to require incredibly brave and bold actions. And we can be brave and bold.”

**‘This is the moment I have to completely show up with everything I have.’**

—JANE FONDA



## robert d. **Bullard**

WRITES TO THE NEXT  
ENVIRONMENTAL-  
JUSTICE LEADERS

**I AM A PROUD BOOMER** and Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran. I am also an environmental-justice fighter. When I began this work in 1979, environmental justice was a footnote. Through our efforts, it is now a headline. But these days, millennials, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z combined far outnumber my generation. So we must equip future generations with the tools and resources to take our plight across the finish line to build climate-resilient communities. Environmental justice embraces the principle that all communities are entitled to equal protection and equal enforcement, along with access to housing, transportation, food security, water, health, and clean energy. Everyone deserves to live in pollution-free neighborhoods where kids can play outside and on playgrounds that chemical plants and landfills do not surround.

It is heartening to see so many young people and students working on these critical issues without the wedges that would have previously driven us apart. Environmentalism is now seen across disciplines through this intergenerational movement. Anyone can be a part of it, and everyone's skills are needed. One does not need to be an expert to join. Mentors, centers, and networks always look for young minds, volunteers, and innovators from all academic areas, from public health to graphic design. Reducing environmental, health, economic, and racial disparities remains a priority of the environmental-justice movement. We must continue this work with the next generations, with science, with data, and with people who understand we do not need false solutions. By gathering community-level air-monitoring data, for example, local advocacy groups petitioned the Texas commission on environmental quality for regular pollution monitoring.

But having data, science, and facts is not enough. We must marry this information with action to make transformative and lasting change. And to solve many environmental problems, we must also solve inequality issues. Avoiding, for example, placing industrial facilities in low-wealth communities of color in the first place.

More important, we cannot continue without "righteous investments" that support the communities most in need. This includes the Justice40 Initiative, which in 2021 formalized President Biden's commitment to make environmental justice a part of tackling climate change. It directs federal agencies to work with states and local communities to deliver on the Administration's promise that at least 40% of the overall benefits from federal climate and clean-energy investments go to disadvantaged communities.

**MANY PROGRESSIVE** social movements that have been successful in the U.S. had young people and students pushing hard at the front. This includes the civil rights movement, peace and justice, women's rights, antiwar movements, and now environmental

justice. We are powerful and unstoppable when we work together. The quest for environmental justice is an ongoing "marathon relay." You run your 26.2 miles, and then the next generation begin their leg of the race. I am driven by, and I am happy to be able to pass the baton to, the up-and-coming generations of environmental-justice advocates who will continue with the same resilience that so many involved in the journey have already shown.

In this next era, my hope is for policy and action to be swift. Climate change does not have 40 more years to wait. Young people, you are valued. I want to see you in rooms involved in the global discussions of change and policy with the opportunity to share the stories of the environmental and climate impacts on our communities. Let us continue to work together and learn from each other so that money can follow need and not power.

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*Bullard is a distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University, and the director of the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at TSU*





## gabriela Hearst

SUSTAINABLE FASHION AS  
THE ULTIMATE LUXURY

By Cady Lang

**WHEN GABRIELA HEARST** launched her namesake brand in 2015, one of the pillars of her design was a resolute commitment to sustainability. It was a decision that came in the wake of a clarion call from her past. Following the death of her father in 2011, the fashion designer inherited Santa Isabel, her family's 17,000-acre ranch, where she grew up in Paysandú, Uruguay. Revisiting her remote childhood home reminded Hearst how they made their own blankets and furniture, drawing on precious resources from the ranch to construct pieces

that would last—a stark contrast to the waste-filled practices of the fashion industry where she had been working for more than a decade. “I started to see the discrepancy between what I was doing in New York and what I was taking care of in Uruguay,” she says. “That’s when I started being very concerned about climate change.”

In the nine years since she founded her label, Hearst has helped redefine her industry, making the case that knowing where clothing materials come from and who crafts them is the truest form of luxury. Her designs, which favor sleek silhouettes, expert tailoring, and meticulous craftsmanship, have become wardrobe staples for the thinking woman. She counts Angelina Jolie, Greta Thunberg, and Jill Biden, who wore one of her dresses to the 2020 presidential Inauguration, among her fans. In addition to heading up Gabriela Hearst, she also

served from 2020 to 2023 as the creative director of the French brand Chloé, which she helped become the first European luxury fashion house to receive a B Corp certification. But while Hearst's profile has risen, her mission remains the same: to create beautiful clothing with care and entice people to join the climate fight. “They have the desire for beauty, so I have to bring consciousness to the product,” she says. “You can’t deny the catastrophes that are constantly happening worldwide that are climate-related. It’s here and it’s happening and we’re all going to pay a price.”

Every step of Hearst's design process is an opportunity to honor climate commitment. She breathes new life into the remnants of Turkish rugs and cashmere scraps, which are reincarnated as colorful overcoats and sharp blazers. Her handbags have a waiting list—not because of a desire for exclusivity, but because she makes them in limited quantities or to order, which helps curtail waste. In 2019, she produced the first carbon-neutral runway show and announced her brand was plastic-free for both front and back of house. She's also refreshingly unconcerned with having her customers buying more. “I’m very happy with my clients just finding one good sweater,” she says. “I grew up with that kind of mentality on the farm; if it’s good quality, it will last you for years. So we wanted to have a product that was well designed and timeless, using the nicest materials in the world and making it at the highest level.”

But Hearst's vision for a more sustainable future extends beyond fashion. She's a vocal advocate for developing nuclear fusion, dedicating her Chloé Spring/Summer '23 collection to the clean-energy solution. She believes her advocacy is as vital to her brand as its more creative aspect. “Your legacy is your value system,” she says. “We know that we’re going to be one of the brands of the future. I am willing to put in the time and dedication because I can see the long-term view. I know exactly where we’re going.”



# john Kerry

RAISING CLIMATE ON THE WORLD STAGE ACROSS FOUR DECADES

By Justin Worland

**SITTING IN A TAXI** in Munich in February, stuck in traffic, John Kerry wrestled with an idea. The U.S. climate envoy was in southern Germany to attend an annual security conference, spending his days pushing world leaders to work together to fight global warming. But in a few hours, the former Secretary of State would receive an award named in honor of a well-known Nazi resister, Ewald von Kleist. As he ruminated on his remarks, he worked to connect what he called the “echoes of the 1930s” in today’s geopolitics with the need for unity on climate action.

By the time he took the stage to accept the award that night, Kerry had found the words to make the connection in a blunt speech lasting less than 15 minutes. “On climate, on Ukraine, and on so much more, the whole world needs to come together,” he told the dignitaries gathered in the ornate Bavarian palace where the ceremony was being held. “I hate to say it, and it’s not an exaggeration—but we do stand next to another abyss. It is the test of our own times, a test as acute and as existential as any previous one.”

Over the past 40 years, Kerry has used his positions as U.S. Senator, Democratic nominee for President, and top American diplomat to bring climate action to the highest levels of international relations, using his stature and knack for persuasion to push the issue at home and abroad. As a Senator, he showed up at global climate meetings to keep the U.S. engaged. He would eventually piece together a bold, if ultimately unsuccessful, congressional effort to price carbon. Running for President, he leaned into the climate message with a commitment unlike any major-party nominee before him. And as Secretary of State he made the issue a State Department priority, created a global oceans conference that



continues to this day, and helped broker the landmark Paris Agreement.

As the issue has risen on the global agenda in recent years, Kerry has been among the most influential voices shaping the tone and substance of the conversation. And despite the dark overtones of his Munich speech, devotees and critics alike often say Kerry’s defining characteristic is his optimism. He is able to look at the most dire situations, from climate change to the Middle East, and identify a path for everyone to come to their senses—often against the odds.

**THAT OPTIMISM** was tested from the start in his role as President Joe Biden’s climate envoy. Kerry entered the job in the middle of the pandemic and in the wake of an Administration that had effectively withdrawn the U.S. from international climate discussions. He immediately began hopping around the world calling on Presidents and princes to deliver the message that the U.S. could be trusted. By the end of the first year, he was launching coalitions and helping broker key international

climate deals. “I know that people criticize the optimism,” says Amos Hochstein, a key international energy adviser to Biden who worked closely with Kerry. “I think it’s his superpower.”

That approach panned out at last year’s U.N. climate conference in Dubai, where Kerry held firm in his support of the oil CEO charged with leading the summit even as many climate advo-

cates called for the executive to step down. “He sticks with his convictions,” says Sue Biniarz, a longtime adviser who served as his deputy climate envoy.

Kerry now begins a new chapter. He resigned from his role as climate envoy on March 6, but at the age of 80, after nearly 40 years in government, he is not retiring. Instead, he plans to join the pri-

ivate sector, drumming up money to finance climate efforts in the places that need it the most. It’s a fitting move. Kerry named his memoir *Every Day Is Extra* after a saying he and his buddies used as a touchstone during the Vietnam War. It’s a reminder to himself—and everyone else—not to sit on the sidelines when problems need solving.

**‘It is the test of our own times, a test as acute and as existential as any previous one.’**

—JOHN KERRY IN MUNICH ON FEB. 17

## nemonte *Nenquimo*

ON RESPECTING THE AMAZON AND  
WHAT IS OWED TO THE PLANET

**SOMEONE RECENTLY ASKED ME** why it was important to protect the Amazon rainforest from oil drilling. The question made me angry. Can you imagine being questioned about the importance of protecting your home from being destroyed in a fire? Or about protecting your home, your extended family's homes, and all your people's homes from demolition? Can you imagine being asked: Why is it important to protect your country from nuclear devastation?

Those questions seem absurd only when you take the existence of your home and your people for granted. Western civilization has always taken the destruction of my home and my people for granted. And now, this well-meaning question assumes that I must offer a defense of my existence. It also presents a false innocence about the asker's complicity in the continued destruction of my home.

As a Waorani leader tasked with communicating beyond our territorial borders to safeguard our land, I often face questions like this. Answering is part of the resistance, and it is not easy. Yet, with Ecuador's government now pushing to ignore our hard-won ban on oil drilling in one of our most biodiverse forests, it remains an urgent question to answer. What I long for, and what the Amazon and Mother Earth demand, can be summed up in what is missing in the questions and policies so often pointed at me and my people: respect.

Why is it important to protect the Amazon rainforest from oil drilling?

We Waorani like to walk. When we need to think, we head off walking in the forest. When we want to express our emotions, we walk and sing: our songs too are fruits of the forest. Wherever we walk, we are in communication with everything around us. We know the plants and the birds in the way city dwellers know the names of streets and the logos of stores. But streets do not breathe and stores do not take flight.

The forest is our grocer, our pharmacy, our hardware store, our theater, our gym, our park. We cultivate our small orchards and walk the forest to hunt and to gather food, medicine, tools, and beauty and art supplies. Politicians and oil executives think that we are idiots, that we plod among the trees picking things up that look yummy. They say that we don't even know the value of the resources beneath the ground. But that is how they show their own ignorance. The oil deep in the earth is the blood of our ancestors. And we know better than to dig up a grave.

Why pillage a grave when life is all around us? We don't need oil. The forest is life itself. We know which plants can heal and which songs to sing to ask permission for cutting them and using their cures. We know that the *petomo* palm fruits in January and February and that its oil is excellent







for maintaining long, shiny hair and healthy skin. We know that the monkeys and the tapirs time their reproductive cycles to coincide with fruit abundance. We know that the peach palm makes the best spears. We know not to use more than we need.

**THE FIRST EUROPEANS** to enter the Amazon wanted only gold and power. They brought disease and murder. It is no wonder that all their tales of adventure describe the forest as a site of danger. I have had dreams of great dangers to come. Unrestrained industrialization has poisoned the atmosphere. Burning down the Amazon will accelerate climate change beyond a point of no return. Uncontrolled warming will imperil life on earth.

Mother Earth will not be saved. She does not need you or anyone to save her. She demands respect. And she will punish humanity for failing to give it. And yet, time and again, people in positions of governmental and industrial power refuse to do so; they insist on destruction.

They've had so many opportunities to respect us, and they've squandered them all. Just in recent years, Ecuador's political class could have upheld Indigenous peoples' rights to free, prior, and informed consent—the right to decide what happens in their territories, as enshrined in international law by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But they didn't. They made us fight. In 2019, my people achieved a historic legal victory protecting a half-million acres of Waorani territory, and setting a legal precedent to protect millions more. The government could have respected that court victory and complied with the ruling, but instead, it has failed to respect it, and continues to have its eye on drilling oil from our lands.

They could have respected our demands to stop all oil drilling and pumping in Yasuní National Park,

one of the most biodiverse places in the world, but they didn't. Again, they made us fight, this time joined by allies across the country. Just last year, the people of Ecuador again made history by voting in a national referendum to stop and permanently ban all oil exploitation in Yasuní. We won. We should be celebrating and coordinating with people in other regions and other countries to help devise strategies to protect their forests. Instead, we are forced to keep fighting: newly elected Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa has called for an illegitimate “moratorium” on complying with the results of the referendum.

Why can't they respect us? Why can't they even respect their own laws? How many times do we have to use the tools of the civilization that wants to destroy us, its courts and elections, to stop their destruction?

Where is the rule of law when the rulers change the laws whenever they feel inconvenienced? Is it really so much to ask for respect?

I often feel heartbroken when I travel abroad to speak about our struggle.

I see how many pos-

sessions and luxuries people have and how they only want more. Their greed fuels the burning of the Amazon. Some people on those trips tell me I'm a hero. No, I'm not. I'm just trying to do something. This is resistance.

Why is it important to protect the Amazon from oil exploitation? My life, the lives of my family and people, our homes, our culture, our language, the lives of myriad plant and animal species, many of which are endemic to the Amazon, the life of the forest itself, and the lives of millions of people, perhaps even yours, all depend on it. Is that good enough?

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*Nenquimo, co-founder of Ceibo Alliance and Amazon Frontlines, is a Waorani leader who has won the Goldman Environmental Prize and a co-author of the upcoming book We Will Be Jaguars with Mitch Anderson*

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# Time Off



## CONJURING A MODERN CIVIL WAR ONSCREEN

## DEV PATEL OFFERS UP AN ODE TO ACTION MOVIES

## JERROD CARMICHAEL REIMAGINES REALITY TV

**W**HEN THE AUTHOR VIET THANH NGUYEN was growing up in California as a refugee from the Vietnam War, depictions of that conflict were omnipresent in American culture. *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and many other films portrayed American heroes fighting their way through a dystopian backwater and then dealing with the psychic toll of defeat back home. Very few of those films gave much thought to the experiences of the Vietnamese—who themselves refer to the conflict as the American War.

It's been 51 years since the last American combat troops departed Vietnam. Nguyen now teaches a class on the war at the University of Southern California, and finds that most of his students—who were born after 2000—haven't seen those movies. But their perspective and themes linger in the air, irrevocably molding the collective memory. "Hollywood has so radically shaped the global understanding of this war and its aftermath," Nguyen says.

Nguyen offered a counternarrative with *The Sympathizer*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2015 novel that follows a North Vietnamese spy during and after the war. Now, that book is getting the Hollywood treatment, a miniseries adaptation premiering on HBO on April 14. The A24 production features a mix of big stars, including Robert Downey Jr., Sandra Oh, and John Cho, and ethnically Vietnamese newcomers, most notably Hoa Xuande in the lead role. Nguyen, who is an executive producer, and the creative team hope the series will force viewers to center the Vietnamese perspective of the conflict while rethinking fundamental American myths, including about how the country still wields its geopolitical power in a fractured world today. "Everything that the United States was doing in 1975 are things that are still happening now," Nguyen says.

**THE SYMPATHIZER TELLS** the story of a half-Vietnamese, half-French communist agent who infiltrates the South Vietnamese military and then embeds in California after the war, hoping to sniff out gestating plots upon his homeland. The novel could hardly have been better received: it won the Pulitzer for fiction and landed on over 30 best-of-2015 lists for its biting wit and ambitious shifts in tone, from thriller to screenplay to satire. But Nguyen, now 53, harbored even grander dreams for his debut novel. "A successful novel might sell tens or hundreds of thousands of copies. But even a bad television series or bad movie would reach millions of people," he says.

Hollywood didn't immediately understand his vision. Nguyen says that in early meetings, producers were uneasy about his insistence that the show center Vietnamese people speaking Vietnamese. But the tone shifted following the political unrest during the Trump era, and the murders of George Floyd in 2020 and of six Asian American women in Atlanta in 2021. "Hollywood's liberalism was challenged," Nguyen says. "It took a while for the people with the capacity to make this kind of thing to catch up."

The adaptation was further boosted by the sign-on of co-showrunner Park Chan-wook, the revered South Korean filmmaker behind *Oldboy* and *The Handmaiden*, who read



▲  
Xuande and  
Downey Jr.  
in *The  
Sympathizer*

*The Sympathizer* and understood how it connected to his own country's history. As in Vietnam, Korea endured a proxy war between the U.S. and the USSR. South Korean soldiers fought alongside Americans and the South Vietnamese in Vietnam. Their involvement in the war spurred an American economic injection that propelled the South Korean economy toward becoming the juggernaut it is today.

Nguyen was thrilled by Park's involvement, as *The Sympathizer* was inspired by *Oldboy* in its darkly funny exploration of violence, memory, and revenge. Park, in turn, recognized a kindred spirit. "The way he went about using humor in such an absurd and dire situation, that was very my style," Park says through a translator.

Nguyen displayed his dark humor one day on set, during the filming of a movie-within-a-movie that skewers Hollywood's one-dimensional depictions of the war. Nguyen asked to be cast as a nameless Vietnamese villager who gets blown up by the inner movie's American heroes, as a symbol for how casually Hollywood treated mangled Asian bodies. "I just thought it would be appropriate for the author to be killed," Nguyen told me, wryly. Instead, he was inserted into the show as a photographer at a party.

The adaptation is fairly faithful to the novel. Park and co-showrunner Don McKellar punched up the spy elements, making Xuande's protagonist, referred to only as the Captain, into more of a noir action hero. That tweak meant that while the character is by no means an angel, he is slightly





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Park, left, and Nguyen  
filming the author's cameo

less brutal than in the novel. A scene in which he wields homophobic tactics to force a confession was altered, for example. “If you make him like Steve McQueen, he’s going to be very charming and sexy,” McKellar says. “It wasn’t to soften him. It just felt natural that in the visual medium, we had to lean into the movie-star appeal more.”

Another key decision that Park made was to have several of the white American characters—a Congressman, a filmmaker, a professor, a CIA agent—be played by one single actor. Park hoped to drive home a conceit central to *The Sympathizer*: that imperialist systems of power are entwined and overlapping. Park’s top choice was Robert Downey Jr., who agreed to take on the multifaceted challenge and serve as an executive producer with his wife Susan Downey, under the banner of their production company Team Downey. Downey Jr.’s presence also adds a meta layer of meaning. Many viewers, especially younger ones, know him best as Iron Man, whom Marvel’s Stan Lee envisioned as the “quintessential capitalist”: a billionaire fighting communism and supplying arms to the U.S. military. Iron Man was first introduced in a 1963 comic, fighting in Vietnam alongside Americans against the racist caricature Wong-Chu, the “red guerrilla tyrant.”

But Nguyen and Park make clear that *The Sympathizer* is neither pro-North Vietnam nor anti-America. Some of the novel’s searing condemnations are aimed at the Vietnamese government, which led to roadblocks in getting the book published in the

country, Nguyen says. McKellar says they tried hard to film in Vietnam—sending hundreds of letters to the censor board—but did not get permission. (They ended up using Thailand as a substitute.) “I expect that [the Vietnamese government] will be pretty unhappy,” McKellar says.

**WHILE THE SYMPATHIZER** spares no faction from criticism, both the book and series also harbor overt ideological aims. Nguyen is something of a progressive firebrand on social media and in public speaking appearances, and doesn’t hide his political goals for the show. Chief among these is challenging audiences to reckon with the corrosive global effects of American power and racism. “There’s a general allergy to this idea that literature or art can have any didactic or political function,” he says. “I think that’s wrong.”

Nguyen hopes the show will reveal the war’s place in American history and its relevance to conflicts still unfolding today. “Americans want to understand their wars as discrete things,” Nguyen says. “But if we’re talking about these wars in Asia, what we’re really talking about is an extension of America’s campaign from its very earliest settlement to continue expanding westwards, all the way to China.

**‘Hollywood has so radically shaped the understanding of this war.’**

VIET THANH NGUYEN, AUTHOR

It’s all part of the same history.”

That history, Nguyen argues, extends to the U.S.’s support of Israel’s prolonged assault on Gaza. In October, a week after Hamas’ attack on Israel, Nguyen signed a letter criticizing Israel’s retaliatory attack on Gaza. The Manhattan venue 92NY pulled Nguyen from a book talk promoting his memoir, *A Man of Two Faces*. Nguyen says that despite potential repercussions, he was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., who stumped against the Vietnam War and its “deadly Western arrogance” in 1967. Nguyen penned a foreword to a reprint of that speech this year. “Here was a man who extended his principles from the cause of Black liberation to the cause of being against American imperialism and what he saw as a racist war in Asia and in Vietnam,” Nguyen says. “I see Israel’s war on Gaza as an opportunity in the same way for moral and political clarity.”

Nguyen risks drawing the ire of right-wing ideologues—who might dismiss *The Sympathizer* as the epitome of a liberal Hollywood indoctrination campaign—and of Hollywood itself, which promised greater representation and creative freedom after 2020 but has become increasingly cautious in a moment of corporate consolidation. “I think the show is quite provocative in ways that are pretty unusual in American popular culture,” says McKellar. “I keep wondering if HBO understands exactly the land mines that they’re walking through here.”

First and foremost, *The Sympathizer* aims to succeed as a work of art: to thrill via its haphazard assassination attempts, clandestine romances, and games of cat-and-mouse. But Nguyen also hopes it stirs uncomfortable introspection and helps shift long-standing narratives. “It’s gonna be unsettling,” he says. “But it’s worth the risk if it could be a lever to affect the mass understanding of the war and its impact on Vietnamese people.” □

## FEATURE

# The pacifist gospel of *Civil War*

BY MATTHEW JACOBS

OUTSIDE OF ATLANTA, A CREAKY WHITE VAN WEAVED down a highway lined with abandoned cars. A helicopter sat in the parking lot of a charred JCPenney. Armed guards in military fatigues patrolled checkpoints. A death squad dumped corpses into a mass grave. Artillery boomed in the offing.

It was all part of a movie set, but to the actors starring in *Civil War*, felt all too real. The new film, opening in theaters April 12, takes place in a near-future United States ravaged by conflict. California and Texas, which make up the so-called Western Forces, have seceded from the union in response to an authoritarian third-term President who has jettisoned the Constitution, disbanded the FBI, authorized airstrikes on his own citizens, and now aims to “eliminate the final pockets of resistance.” To create as credible a dystopia as possible, director Alex Garland and the crew turned parts of the Atlanta region into a soberingly plausible hot spot.

“It felt very disturbing,” says Kirsten Dunst, one of the leads, of the film’s blurring with reality. “Toward the end, it was all the noise and the gunfire, and then just looking at the news and seeing that there’s another school shooting.”

By the time *Civil War* premiered at the South by Southwest Film & TV Festival in mid-March, it had already generated some heat online. Reddit commenters debated whether invoking such severe domestic turbulence is irresponsible at a time when the nation’s political divisions have reached a fever pitch. One person worried it “might be interpreted as a role model to MAGA groups if not portrayed carefully.” Garland, the British science-fiction ace who made *Ex Machina* and *Annihilation*, anticipated polarized reactions. In a sense, they’re why he made *Civil War* in the first place. “It’s really a film about why polarization is not a great thing,” he says. “It’s trying to have a conversation. It’s trying to find common ground.”

**ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE**, *Civil War* is also an intimate character study. Dunst plays Lee, a jaded photojournalist traveling with three colleagues—two reporters (Wagner Moura of *Narcos* fame and *Lady Bird*’s Stephen McKinley Henderson) and a novice photographer (*Priscilla*’s Cailee Spaeny)—from New York City to Washington, D.C., which Moura’s grizzled ringleader predicts is on the cusp of falling. There, they hope to question a President (Nick Offerman) who hasn’t given an interview in more than a year. The journey through a nation at war with itself is a circuitous, 857-mile odyssey, much like a video game in which the hero must evade death or capture by antagonists. In this case, those foes are power-hungry goons wielding carbines. Garland based these threats and detours (which, if you’re doing math, nearly quadrupled the length of the journey) on real-world analogues, like a



▼  
Garland has often used film to grapple with the idea that life is spiraling beyond control



thug, played by Jesse Plemons, whose MO is loosely inspired by the Khmer Rouge, the totalitarian movement that took over Cambodia in 1975.

Budgeted at \$50 million, *Civil War* is the most expensive movie A24 has released, teeing up a more commercial era for the trendy indie studio that built its renown on auteur-driven projects like *The Zone of Interest*, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, and *Moonlight*. But unlike some sweeping apocalyptic blockbuster or *The Last of Us*-style genre hybrid, its psychodrama doesn’t incorporate fantasy tropes. You won’t find any zombies here. Lee becomes a reluctant mentor to Spaeny’s Jessie, who quickly notes that she shares a name with distinguished World War II photojournalist Lee Miller (soon to be portrayed by Kate Winslet in a biopic).

Garland drafted the film during 2020’s COVID-19 lockdowns. He’d contracted the disease early on. Upon emerging from quarantine in Gloucestershire, England, he stepped into what he calls a “reverse Narnia.” The world around him felt strange, paranoid,





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Dunst trained with  
photojournalists  
to convincingly  
inhabit the motions  
of a wartime  
photographer

and divided. He wrote the script that spring, anticipating a future further riven by sectarian strife. He mapped out a fictional backstory to the film's events but omits most of it from the screen. The year *Civil War* takes place is unspecified, and although the President seems to have a Trumpian view of the Constitution's impermanence, there is no firm left-vs.-right ideology at play. Even the actors say they weren't given much context. "We kind of built what happened before in our own minds," Moura recalls. "We never really spoke about it." Even though *Civil War* forgoes Garland's usual sci-fi lens, it shares with his previous work a sense that life has spiraled beyond our control. Withholding the how and why is kind of the Garland way.

De-emphasizing the political tick-tock lets *Civil War* home in on its conflict's human toll. As the quartet gets closer to D.C., their steely exteriors crack—and yet their pursuit remains steadfast, even if it could result in death. It's a higher calling, and perhaps an adrenaline addiction. Garland made the arduous choice to shoot the movie chronologically, so the intensity

the actors experienced was constantly mounting. "I've never been scared like that before, and I've never felt more alive," Jessie declares after an especially harrowing chapter.

Garland's crew bolted eight small cameras to the protagonists' van. Because so many scenes occurred in the car, the production felt profoundly intimate. Spaeny likens the road scenes to a play. But unlike theater, or even a typical movie shoot, *Civil War* changed locations every few days as the characters' trek progressed, introducing constant logistical puzzles for the producers and craftspeople to solve.

The third act, filmed at Tyler Perry's 330-acre Atlanta studio, which contains a replica of the White House, is explosive—literally. Choppers drop bombs, buildings catch fire, Humvees roll in, smoke clogs the night sky. Garland used visual effects to blow up the Lincoln Memorial as the journalists face guerrillas closing in on the capital. To prepare, the cast watched the 2018 documentary *Under the Wire*, which chronicles war correspondents in Syria. Dunst and Spaeny trained with photographers to master camera functions so they'd seem seasoned even as chaos erupted. "That was my biggest fear: not looking comfortable or like this is something that's a part of my body," says Dunst, who studied under Austin-based shutterbug Greg Giannukos. Garland also enlisted Ray Mendoza, a former Navy SEAL, as a military adviser; Mendoza choreographed the final sequence and hired veterans as extras.

**THE MOVIE'S VERISIMILITUDE** is what got the internet commentariat buzzing when *Civil War*'s trailer debuted in December. Some, upon learning the conflict's origins aren't more explicit, might accuse the movie of pulling punches. But Garland sought to avoid a "lecture" about the state of the nation. "If you're honest, you don't need to be told because you already know," at least vaguely, what caused the turmoil, he says. "There's a lot of films that tell everything to everyone and make everything completely digestible. I'm not particularly interested in doing it because it feels oppositional to engagement. 'Left vs. right' closes down the conversation. That is the problem with polarization."

Even the idea that Texas and California, which rarely agree on anything, would both secede is a rebuttal to the disunity that *Civil War* critiques. Why, Garland asks, is it so hard to believe that two disparate states would rebel against a fascist government remaking America in the President's image? Secession movements in both Texas (dubbed "Texit") and California ("CalExit") have sprung up recently, with the latter conceptualizing an "alternative to potential civil violence and civil war in the country."

If the movie preaches anything, it's a pacifist gospel. Hollywood sometimes struggles to separate the repugnance of war from the glorification of it. Here, the thesis is unmistakable. "It's an antiwar film, which is problematic to do because cinema doesn't necessarily want to be antiwar," Garland says, reflecting a not-uncommon concern among pundits that the thrill of seeing warfare on a big screen numbs audiences. But from where Garland sits, at least, it demands to be seen. As the subhead on *Rolling Stone*'s SXSW review blared, NO, IT'S NOT A DOCUMENTARY—YET. □

**'It's trying  
to find  
common  
ground.'**

ALEX GARLAND,  
DIRECTOR



◀ Patel as Kid, with and without his signature disguise

## MOVIES

## A jumbled parable with a glowing core

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

EVEN WHEN A MOVIE IS FAR FROM PERFECT, YOU CAN tell when a director has poured his soul into it. Dev Patel's directorial debut *Monkey Man*—he's also the movie's star—is trying too hard, and for too much. It wants to be a political allegory, a somber study of a man haunted by childhood trauma, a clarion blast of inspiration for downtrodden humans seeking to summon strength, and last but not least, a brutally exhilarating action entertainment. It succeeds at some of those things, some of the time. But Patel's conviction, both as a fledgling director and an intensely likable actor, has a blurring effect on the movie's flaws. Just when you realize you're confused by the somewhat muddled story, or lost in its myriad references, his solemn warmth draws you back in. The movie wouldn't work with another star. It's Patel's show through and through.

His character has a generic name, Kid, that marks him as a man who's never been able to find his center. He lives in the fictional city of Yatana—with its mix of obscene wealth and abject poverty, its views of *tuk-tuks* slashing down the road and street dwellers huddled under newspapers, it's like a cross between Mumbai and Gotham City. Kid makes a meager living as a wrestler at an underground fight club, his haunted visage hidden by an ape mask. A sleazy promoter (Sharlto Copley) pays him to lose to his opponents, and every night he's surrounded by spectators howling for his blood. He's the classic underdog who's ready to burst out of his skin.

We get Kid's backstory bits at a time, in shardlike flashbacks. He was raised in an idyllic forest setting by a mother (Adithi Kalkunte) who clearly adores him. They

**It's Patel's show through and through**

play hide-and-seek in their leafy paradise; she regales him with inspiring but somewhat terrifying tales of the Hindu monkey god Hanuman. We come to learn that Kid later witnessed his mother's rape and murder at the hands of a crooked cop, Rana (Sikander Kher), during a monstrous invasion of the family's tranquil village. (The authorities launch their attack, mercilessly, while the local kids are gathered for a puppet show, one of whose star figures happens to be a paper-mache Hanuman.)

Back in the present, Kid manages to land a menial job in a glitzy brothel, where the sneering, preening Rana is a regular. He's still moonlighting in that wrestling ring, but his diffuse rage has a new focus: he will avenge his mother's murder by bringing Rana down, an elaborate process that begins with a cocaine vial filled with bleach. What follows is an extended and choppy edited sequence of bone-jarring violence, during which Kid reinvents himself as an action figure, a ruthless fighter who tumbles, leaps, and kicks his way out of his own internal prison, emerging battered and bloody though not yet victorious. That victory will have to wait; this elaborate showdown hits barely halfway through the movie.

**THERE'S A LOT** going on in *Monkey Man*, including a subplot involving a charismatic guru and political schemer (Makarand Deshpande) who's gearing up for certain victory in an upcoming election. His role in Kid's story emerges, shakily, in the last section of the film, but until then, his phony radiance and pious pronouncements mark him as a power-mad serpent who can't be trusted. The movie's gears are further churned by a rotating crew of supporting characters—including a group of exiled *hijra*, people identifying as a third gender—whose roles aren't always as fleshed out as they could be. Patel, who co-wrote the script with



Paul Angunawela and John Collee, seems to want *Monkey Man* to serve numerous purposes, and his intentions collide in a muddy swirl. His targets include racism and religious intolerance in modern India and the indifference of the ruling class toward the poor, but the movie skitters across this surface of ideas like a stone skipping over water.

It's often hard to know exactly what *Monkey Man* is trying to say, and its self-serious tone doesn't help. Patel began filming before the pandemic, and finishing the movie was a trial; it was fated for a streaming release until filmmaker and producer Jordan Peele intervened on its behalf. (The picture is being released in theaters by Universal.) As a young actor, Patel broke through in the role of a downtrodden Muslim Indian in Danny Boyle's 2008 *Slumdog Millionaire*; more recently, he played the lackadaisical-turned-brave Gawain in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*, and made a marvelous Dickensian hero in Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History of David Copperfield*. Patel is an Englishman, the son of first-generation immigrants (his parents are Gujarati Indians from Nairobi); his identity is his to shape as he chooses, and *Monkey Man* appears to be a step toward that defining of the self.

There is much eye-gouging, throat-slashing, and calf-slashing along the way; this movie is not for the faint of heart, and most of its violence is grimly humorless. But Patel, even playing a character hell-bent on revenge, is so filled with light that he sometimes seems to have whirled in from another movie. In addition to being a jumbled parable, *Monkey Man* is an ode to the action movies Patel has always loved—Bruce Lee is one of his heroes—and as a performer, he's so sure-footed that he almost single-handedly makes you believe in this movie's mission, whatever it is. Kid, speaking in a language of balletic jetés and boxer-like jabs, is on the side of right, not might, and Patel pushes that idea across with both body and spirit. Whatever Patel is going for, he's at least singing out with conviction—not just from the diaphragm but also from the muscle better known as the heart. □

#### TELEVISION

## The real Carmichael show

BY JUDY BERMAN

JERROD CARMICHAEL HAD BEEN a famous comedian for almost a decade when he dropped his average-dude persona and started being real. In his 2022 special, *Rothaniel*, he came out as gay, speaking with rueful humor about internalized homophobia and his fractured relationship with his devoutly Christian mother. It was a creative turning point as well as a personal one.

*Jerrold Carmichael Reality Show* continues his experiment in radical honesty. Framed by Carmichael's onstage monologues, it's disarmingly frank about not only his life, but also its own constructedness. We watch him coax family and friends to discuss hard topics on camera. Crew members swarm. By making us privy to these contrivances, he establishes authenticity within a notoriously artificial genre.

*Reality Show* teems with awkward exchanges. In the premiere, Carmichael confronts his best friend, rapper Tyler, the Cre-

ator, about how Tyler has been avoiding him since Carmichael confessed to being in love with him. It doesn't go well. Neither does Carmichael's talk with his father about the older man's

infidelity—a pattern he sees mirrored in his own cheating. Or a conversation in which his mom says, "I love you just the way you are," but also equates gay identity with being a murderer.

Carmichael is hardest on himself, questioning whether he can become a good friend, a faithful boyfriend, a person who doesn't need cameras around to be honest. Yet *Reality Show* is no slog; it's funny, if often darkly so, because its protagonist is funny. At a moment when most comedians brand themselves as either maverick truth tellers or righteous arbiters of virtue, it's refreshing to see Carmichael aim to be perceived precisely as he is.

*Jerrold Carmichael Reality Show* premieres March 29 on HBO

**Reality Show teems with awkward exchanges**



Carmichael lays bare the artifice of reality television

## William McRaven The retired admiral who took down Osama bin Laden on why U.S. leadership matters, the AI race, and what he's going to do with \$50 million

**You recently received the Bezos Courage and Civility Award, with \$50 million to give to charities of your choice. How are you planning to use it?** Almost all of this is going to be focused on veterans and their families—the children who've lost fathers and mothers in combat. And the other area is mental health for servicemen. What don't the VA and the military health care system cover?

**The U.S. military is seeing record-low recruitment numbers. Last year, the military services missed recruiting goals by about 41,000 recruits. How big of a concern is this?** Our pipeline for young men and women coming into the military is generally through high schools, and because of COVID, military recruiters didn't have an opportunity to get in. I think we'll find in a couple years that our numbers get back up to where we need them to be.

**How are you thinking about the challenges, and the opportunities, of AI when it comes to national security?** It'll help us diagnose problems quicker, it will help us resolve problems quicker. Its ability to discriminate between good guys and bad guys is important. Nobody in the military wants to inadvertently kill civilians.

**What about concerns that the U.S. may risk losing its technological edge to adversaries like China unless it moves more quickly?** We are still decades ahead of the Chinese in terms of our creativity, our entrepreneurial approach... our AI and machine learning is fundamentally better. But that doesn't mean you don't need to turn your head around and see how they're progressing. It's important for the military to work with Silicon Valley and stay engaged.

### What keeps you up at night in 2024?

People always think I would answer something like North Korea or Iran, but my answer is always: K-12 education. If we're not educating to have STEM skills, think critically, and understand other cultures, then they're not going to be the national-security leaders we need.



**Ahead of the 2024 election, a lot of America's allies are anxious about the prospect of another Trump presidency that could withdraw the U.S. from the global stage. Do you think domestic politics is harmful to U.S. leadership abroad?** Even people that disagree with our politics understand that U.S. leadership is the most important in the world, because who else is going to lead if we don't? Nobody of any consequence really wants Russia or China leading, certainly not our allies. So we need to continue to keep those alliances strong in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, or building alliances in the Middle East. Whoever the next President is needs to continue to reinforce these alliances.

**Looking at the war in Gaza, what do you think of the criticism that the U.S. is not leveraging its leadership effectively?** The attacks on Oct. 7 were about as vile and as heinous as any attacks we've seen in modern time. So you have to understand and appreciate the Israelis' position on striking back. But there are a lot of innocent Palestinians that have gotten caught up in this war. This is where we need U.S. leadership to step up. You want to do what you can to make sure that Hamas never has the opportunity to strike again. But at the same time, you have to do everything you can to make sure that you're not inadvertently killing civilians. And from what I've seen, the U.S. is making a strong case now to the Israelis that they need to take this very, very seriously.

**Speaking of leadership, your name comes up fairly regularly in election cycles. Would you ever run for office?** I have absolutely no plans to run for office. I've been married for 45 years, and if I want to make it to 46 I'm gonna have to stay here in Austin.

—VERA BERGENGRUEN

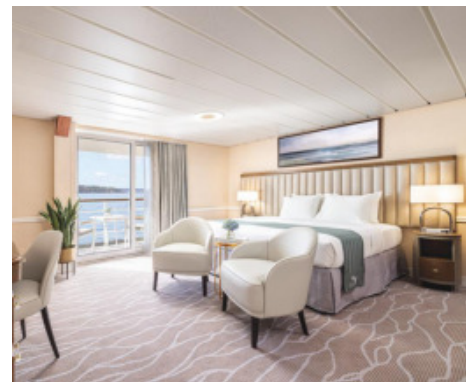




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